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**Hidden postcolonial conscience in Italian cinema:
Attempts to autodefine ‘the Italian’ through representations of the
Black Other in the *commedia all’italiana***

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**A thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Italian Studies**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. Inclusions of articles that have appeared in journals, as well as from a former dissertation at Master's level, have been mentioned in the footnotes to the respective sections.

Abstract

In the debate surrounding the possible displacement of Italian Fascism and an accompanying denial of memories of colonisation, some scholars assume that Italian filmmakers concentrated with few (predominantly auterurist) exceptions on the former colonised (countries) only after ca. 1980, a narrative which keeps alive two myths: that of a ‘backwards Italy’, and that of the *italiani brava gente*.

Analyses of four *commedie all’italiana* suggest otherwise: In this study, I centralise several portrayals of characters that I identify as Black Others, in which we could recognise an embodiment of the former colonised. Physically and/or behaviourally contrasted to characters that are presented as *italiani medi*, these characters are marked as different from ‘Italians’ – illustrating *italiani medi*’s attempt to present themselves as white. I use this binary as a heuristic tool in order to unravel underlying patterns of binary oppositions that reconfirm prejudices and stereotypes stemming from the colonial period and its accompanying narratives, present in the Italian society at the time of the making of the films, many of which echoing in our current society. The connection between the four films (1952-1968/73) makes way for a continuous dialogue surrounding constructions of *italianità* and several forms of o/Otherness, as portrayed through the comedic approach of the grotesque. The object of our ridicule turns out to be not a presumed Black Other in the minstrel tradition, but the character of the *italiano medio*, who continuously demonstrates a desperate need to construct out a physical Other from the imagined community of Italy; through the latter’s eyes, *italiani medi* can exist. As such, they are denaturalised as the norm. In every next film, the character identifiable as the Black Other gains in agency, in the end, framing, and dominating, the narrative of the *italiano medio*.

Introduction

In 2015, I attended a conference in Florence, entitled *Black Portraiture[s] II: Imaging the Black Body and Re-staging Histories*.¹ Hosted by New York University (NYU), the foundation for this conference was in 1994, when *Villa La Pietra* was bequeathed to the university. Upon their arrival, the NYU staff noticed the many blackamoors that were part of the art collection of the villa, and wondered about their place in history and the meaning of this. The sixth in a series of visual arts conferences inaugurated by Harvard University in 2004 with *Bridging the Gaps*, the conference *Black Portraiture[s] II* was a result of the questions the NYU staff asked in 1994, with the overall theme of discussing, deconstructing, and re-signifying ‘European’² or ‘Western’ historical and visual arts narratives, which have both stereotyped and ridiculed on the one hand, and on the other hand marginalised, and often excluded completely, Black subjects, their narratives, and their cultural production.³ The presence of the aforementioned

¹ <<http://www.blackportraits.info/>> [accessed 21 November 2017].

² Describing the notion of eurocentrism, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam argue that when they refer to European, and Europeans, this includes the United States, Australia, ‘and elsewhere’, since they consider those places ‘neo-European’. When using the adjective ‘European’, I follow their definition. ‘Western’ is in quotation marks, since Western Europe, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand are often referred to as such, whereas this geographical positioning is a matter of perspective. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 1. The focus during the conference, however, was almost exclusively on African-American cultures and traditions.

³ Following Lori L. Tharps, I use the capital B here when referring to Black people and characters (in the films that form the corpus of this research). In the mid 1920s, W.E.B. Du Bois demanded that book publishers, newspaper editors and magazines capitalize the N in Negro when referring to Black people. The argument was, that when speaking of a culture, ethnicity or group of people, the name should be capitalised. Tharps concludes that, ‘[i]f we’ve traded Negro for Black, why was that first letter demoted back to lowercase, when the argument had already been won? [...] Black should always be written with a capital B.

blackamoors in the Italian villa is one illustration of this, as are the current discussions about, for instance, the Dutch tradition of Zwarte Piet,⁴ and the absence of African philosophers in British (and other European) university curricula.⁵ The conference, therefore, acknowledged and discussed from academic and artistic perspectives critical issues which can be considered ‘topical’, and are discussed in main stream media with often recurring terms such as ‘white/male privilege’, ‘political correctness’, ‘gender politics’, ‘Fortress Europe’, and ‘intersectionality’. Accompanying the conference, an art exhibition called *ReSignifications*, organised by Awam Amkpa, was held at Museo Bardini, in which Black art was confronted with, and oftentimes juxtaposed to, traditional conceptions of European art, which traditionally centralised white artists or art about white people.⁶

We are indeed a people, a race, a tribe. It’s only correct.’ I also capitalise Black to emphasise the distinction between the ‘colour’ black and the ‘culture, ethnicity or group of people’ that identify as Black. The capital B emphasizes that I refer to a conceptualisation of a group, not of the actual skin colour of the people described as such. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/opinion/the-case-for-black-with-a-capital-b.html?_r=0> [accessed 21 November 2017].

⁴ Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe After Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1-6.

⁵ In Britain, discussions on changing the university curricula in a variety of disciplines are being held by students. *Why is My Curriculum White?* has become their slogan. <<https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/why-is-my-curriculum-white/>> [accessed 21 November 2017]. When I started studying art history in Amsterdam in 2003, I was told that the curriculum was focused on ‘Western’ art. If I preferred to include ‘non-Western’ art, I would have had to go and study either anthropology or archaeology. This also illustrates the problematic rigidity of academic ‘disciplines’, to which I return below.

⁶ Awam Amkpa, *ReSignifications: European Blackamoors, Africana Readings* (Rome: PostcArt, 2016). With Black art, I refer to Michael Boyce Gillespie’s definition of Black film: ‘black film as a critical capacity and not agential authority (...), black film is art or creative interpretation and not merely the visual transcription of the black lifeworld’. Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 5. I get back to this publication below.

The notion of resignification has gained considerable academic popularity over the last two decades. Judith Butler applies it in the context of gender performativity. In order to unravel a system in which she considers both the boundary and surface of bodies politically constructed, she describes the method applied in *Gender Trouble* as ‘a strategy to denaturalize and resignify bodily categories’, by proposing

a set of parodic practices based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame.⁷

At the NYU conference, a dominating tendency in panels was to unravel the performative, and binary, nature of racial stereotypes in European visual arts, to emphasise its political implications, and to celebrate Black culture from a Pan-African (albeit predominantly African-American) perspective.⁸

Through re-readings of Herman Melville, Friedrich Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and Marcel Proust, Eve Sedgwick proposes in *Epistemology of the Closet* that the imperative to categorise and fixate straight and gay identities

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999), p. xxxi. Sara Salih, ‘Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification’, in *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. by Sara Salih (Maldon, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, ‘Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification’, in *JAC*, 20.4 (2000), 727-65.

⁸ The Pan-African perspective could be described as ‘pursu[ing] and advanc[ing] the social, cultural, political, and economic interests of Africans, African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and the rest of diasporic Africans throughout the world.’ Ayele Bekerie, ‘African Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War’, in *Revisioning Italy. National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 131, note 1.

- again, a simplified binary opposition - has become central to the major forms of thought and knowledge of the twentieth century. She concludes that '[a]ny aspect of modern Western culture (...) [is] damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition', while 'the internal incoherence and mutual contradiction of each of the forms of discursive and institutional "common sense" on [modern sexual definition are] inherited from the architects of our present culture'.⁹

An approach similar to the ones described by Butler and Sedgwick, and to the *Black Portraiture* conference theme, is one of the points of departure of this study, underlining the intersectional approach of this research, as two of its inspirational texts are positioned within the field of gender theory. During the analyses of the films in this study, I refer repeatedly (but by no means exclusively) to gender theory perspectives; In what follows, I identify certain resignifications inside four *commedie all'italiana*, in order to reconsider some historical and critical narratives surrounding this group of films, which are traditionally based on binary principles. In certain *commedie all'italiana*, films that are considered 'typically Italian', I recognise, contrary to popular and scholarly belief, the recurring presence of a specific character that I describe as the Black Other, which in the specific cases analysed below is more than 'merely a stock figure' – even though a trope of the Black Other as a background feature certainly exists (see below).¹⁰ With the notion of the Other, I do not intend the

⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 1-2.

¹⁰ Describing the perception of the character of the prostitute in Italian film, Danielle Hipkins sets out her research project by arguing that the prostitute in specific Italian films is 'more than merely a stock figure.'

‘other’ without a capital, which can be interpreted as anyone ‘who is separate from one’s self’, but instead Jacques Lacan’s usage of the term, which he differentiates from the same word without a capital: he refers to the *grand-autre*, the parental great Other, ‘in whose gaze the subject gains identity’. As Bill Ashcroft et. al. argue,

[t]his Other can be compared to the imperial centre, imperial discourse, or the empire itself, in two ways: first, it provides the terms in which the colonised subject gains a sense of his or her identity as somehow ‘other’, dependent; second, it becomes the ‘absolute pole of address’, the ideological framework in which the colonised subject may come to understand the world. In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonised is continually located in the gaze of the imperial Other, the ‘grand-autre’.¹¹

However, in this research, I refer to characters who are presented as former colonisers, Italians, as the ones gaining identity through the presence of characters whose bodies metaphorically represent the former colonised, since it is the presence of the Black Other that makes possible a construction of the notion of *italianità*. It therefore becomes clear that the binary opposition of Black and white as presented within these films is a fabrication, since these productions bring to the fore, to quote Sedgwick, the ‘internal incoherence and mutual contradiction of each of the forms of discursive and institutional “common

Danielle Hipkins, *Italy’s Other Women. Gender and Prostitution in Italian Cinema, 1940-1965* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), p.1.

¹¹ Bill Ashcroft et. al., *Post-Colonial Studies. The Key Concepts*, second edition (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 155-56.

sense''' on, in this case, racial difference. My intention is therefore to point out a resignification of the notion of *italianità* as presented in the *commedie all'italiana* described below, and to nuance the assumption of Ashcroft et.al. that 'the coloniser' is the one exclusively providing the terms in which the colonised subjects gain their identities, since the films discussed below illustrate the opposite. In these *commedie all'italiana*, it becomes gradually clearer that the character of the Black Other gains the sense of agency over stereotypical performances of both the *italiano medio* and Black Otherness, as such displaying knowledge, challenging the colonial epistemology in which the *italiani medi* continue to believe. With a 'sense of agency', I follow Shaun Gallagher's definition: [t]he sense that I am the one who is causing or generating an action. For example, the sense that I am the one who is causing something to move, or that I am the one who is generating a certain thought in my stream of consciousness.'¹²

Indeed, over a period of two decades, the characters identified as Black Others in the films that form the corpus of this study slowly take over the leading task of framing/filming the *italiano medio*. In these *commedie*, the notion of *italianità*, and former colonising subjects, depend more and more on a non-Italian, whose presence validates the existence of the former. The Black body physically distinguishable from the Italian white body functions as a necessary blank slate onto which Italian subjects can project fears, anxieties, forbidden erotic desires, and other effects of a colonial past, the loss of World War II, and a sense of a national identity to be redefined. I use the notion of projection in the Freudian

¹² Shaun Gallagher, 'Philosophical Conceptions of the Self: Implications for Cognitive Science', in *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, vol. 4 (2000), 14-21.

sense: '[a]n internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of distortion, enters consciousness in the form of an external perception.'¹³ In other words: the *italiani medi* project these images onto Black Others in order not to identify with them on a conscious level themselves. With the specification of Black Other, I aim to point out the racializing subtext that often dominates the imaginary of *italianità* in the context of the four *commedie all'italiana* discussed in the following chapters. I follow Karim Murji and John Solmos' definition of the term racialization, a common buzzword as they argue; it refers to a situation in which 'ethnic and group boundaries are defined in terms of race, understood as colour or biological difference'. In the Italian context, racial difference is more often determined in terms of colour and culture, than in terms of an explicit biological difference.¹⁴

Discussing the notions of 'film blackness', and 'black film', Michael Boyce Gillespie offers the following considerations.

Film blackness demands more ambition for the idea of black film as a critical capacity and not agential authority. What if black film could be something other than embodied? What if black film was immaterial and bodiless? What if black film could be speculative or just ambivalent?

¹³ Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories II* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 204.

¹⁴ Karim Murji and John Solomos, *Racialization. Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 2. On the notion of racialization, see the introduction of that book, pp. 1-27, and Ali Rattansi's 'The Uses of Racialization: The Time-spaces and Subject-objects of the Raced Body', pp. 271-301. Rattansi offers no strict definition, but argues that the notion of racialization 'functions to open up avenues of inquiry and understanding that the blunt attribution of 'racism' has a tendency to close down' (p. 271).

(...) What if black film is art or creative interpretation and not merely the visual transcription of the black lifeworld?¹⁵

Gillespie goes on by referring to a literary critic who reduces the cultural archival resources of the author Ralph Ellison to Black culture and Black history, as an illustration of a limitative interpretation of the latter's literary production. He finally argues that film blackness

denotes a reading practice devoted to the cinematic, the visual production of blackness (black visibility), and the critical ways that art disputes, distends, and aspires. This multidiscursive property of blackness signals the interpretative and performative capacity of the art of blackness as an aesthetic, cultural, and political engineering of craft.

While Gillespie works and discusses predominantly in/on African-American film and culture, which is a very complex and different context from the Italian (cinematographic) reality, I follow Gillespie's interpretation of Black film, or film Blackness, as a broader and more complex notion than simply 'a film about, or made by, a Black artist'.¹⁶ We can ask ourselves the question: can we speak of Black film, when referring to certain *commedie all'italiana*?

In the appearance of these Black Other characters, positioned in the plots and frames of the films as a contrast to the type of the *italiano medio*, I am interested in identifying, in the shape of a subversive resignification, a problematisation of the binary frame concerning the social construct of race, or

¹⁵ Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 5.

¹⁶ The question of who or what a Black artist would be, is also problematic: is it anyone who identifies as such? What to think about someone like Rachel Doležal, the American former civil rights activist and visual artist who claimed to be Black while being of Caucasian European decent?

more specifically, the notions of insider/outsider that are visually communicated through imaginaries of racial belonging and difference, which stem from the Italian imperial period. This problematisation is expressed through the underlining of the performative nature of *italianità* and Black Otherness, and through a shift of the positions of both characters in the various plots of the films; whereas the *italiano medio* is portrayed in every film as more ‘Black’ (see below), the character of the Black Other gains in agency by framing the *italiano medio* character instead of the other (imperial/racialised) way around. In the films, these Black Other characters therefore communicate a denaturalisation of racial (and other) categories and binaries. In this sense, they embody a postcolonial critique, challenging and re-sign-ifying the notions of a national self and other – and Other – in the Italian post-imperial context. With this, in turn, we can trace back Italian postcolonial critique to decades before what many scholars tend to suggest as its starting date: the *commedia all’italiana*’s heyday was in the 1960s, whereas some critical studies situate the beginning of Italian postcolonial theory around the mid 1980s-1990s.¹⁷

I do not intend to suggest that the presence of the Black Other in *commedie all’italiana* is an omnipresence, since it is specific to particular *commedia all’italiana* films. The corpus of this research does not include the most (inter-)nationally famous or most celebrated *commedie all’italiana*, such as *I soliti ignoti* (Mario Monicelli, 1958), *Divorzio all’italiana* (Pietro Germi, 1961), or *I mostri* (Dino Risi, 1963) but instead is identified as a sub-set. I discuss this in

¹⁷ Cfr. Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory?’ (2016), 145-61, Grace Russo Bullaro (ed.), *From Terrone to Extracomunitario. New Manifestations of Racism in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing Ltd, 2010). Below, I discuss the debate surrounding this ‘amnesia’.

detail in chapter one and two.

Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), added to many lists of 'best films ever made', is widely recognised as the (Italian) film *par excellence* about the violence accompanying western colonisation. However, the film does not mention Italy's own colonial past: Italian colonial enterprises started in 1869 with the occupation of the bay of Asseb (today's Eritrea) and ended in 1947 during the Treaty of Paris, during which Italy abandoned claims to all of its former colonies (Eritrea, Tianjin, China, Somalia, the Dodecanese, Greece, Libya, Ethiopia, Albania).¹⁸ As a consequence, Italian citizens did not engage with an explicit public decolonisation debate like other European colonial powers, which went through (in some aspects still unresolved) decolonisation processes on a national scale starting around 1960. In fact, the supposition of some scholars is that, with the displacement of fascism, public discourses in Italy, including popular entertainment media, also displaced the memories of colonisation, of which *The Battle of Algiers* is an illustration. Clarissa Clò, for instance, supports her supposition that Italian filmmakers were prevented from projecting or even making movies about Italy's colonial past, by describing two film projects that discussed Italian colonization, which were either stopped during the production,

¹⁸ Cfr. Angelo Del Boca *Gli italiani in Africa orientale*, 4 vol. (Milan: Mondadori, 2001), Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, *L'Africa d'Italia. Una storia coloniale e postcoloniale* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2011), Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare. Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Mia Fuller (ed.), *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory* (Oxford etc.: Peter Lang, 2005), Valeria Deplano, Alessandro Pes (ed.), *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani* (Milan, Udine: Mimesis, 2014).

or never shown in Italian movie theatres.¹⁹ Anna Di Sapio and Marina Medi illustrate, moreover, that the archives concerning Italy's colonial enterprises have been closed for a long time, and the Italian educational materials hardly discuss the matter.²⁰

According to this narrative, the myth of *italiani brava gente* has as a consequence remained fairly intact until quite recently, and partly continues to exist.²¹ This myth consists of the idea that, in terms of the national colonial enterprises, Italians were both disorganised and therefore unable to do much damage, and 'good' colonisers who only colonised in order to 'modernise' and 'help' the colonised subjects, as a contrary to other European colonisers; in more general terms, the myth consists of the assumptions that, '[f]lawed but ultimately good, more fickle than Fascist, (...) Italians are vaccinated by Christianity against

¹⁹ One script of 1953 on the Italian occupation in Greece resulted in a military sentence for its producer Renzo Renzi – the film proposal was never realized, while a film about the Libyan resistance to Italian colonialism of 1981, by Moustapha Akkad, was banned from Italian public theatres. Clarissa Clò, 'Mediterraneo interrupted: Perils and Potentials of Representing Italy's Occupations in Greece and Libya Through Film', *Italian Culture* 27.2 (2009), 99-115.

²⁰ Anna Di Sapio and Marina Medi, *Il lontano presente: l'esperienza coloniale italiana. Storia e letteratura tra presente e passato* (Bologna: Editrice missionaria italiana, 2009).

²¹ Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005). The title of this study derives from a quote by journalist P. Battista, who in *La Stampa* of 28 August 2004 argued that the 'mito autoconsolatorio' of *italiani brava gente* consists of 'un'immagine di sé che gli italiani del dopoguerra democratico, vaccinati dalla boria nazionalistica somministrata in overdose dal passato regime, hanno amato divulgare di sé nella politica e nel cinema, nella moda, nella cucina, nei modelli di comportamento. Italiani «brava gente», dicevano. Uno scudo di bonarietà, di giovialità, di naturale inclinazione alla mitezza e alla socialità cordiale e informale che avrebbe dovuto metterci al riparo dall'ostilità efferata, un confortevole cuscinetto capace di attutire l'urto drammatico della storia e della crudeltà.'

totalitarianism and by poverty against hubris.’²² The Italian filmic approach of neorealism is considered ‘the cradle of the *brava gente* rhetoric’, as it often confirms the narrative that ‘only Italians who have cast aside Catholic values and abandoned modesty for greed can be truly evil.’²³ This underlines how film can affect political, theoretical, and historical discussions surrounding a sense of national history. Since the *brava gente* myth has been contested for a long time, there is no overall consensus surrounding this ‘amnesia’. I intend to add to discussions surrounding this notion of a sense of ‘amnesia’.

Over the last two decades, however, interest outside and inside academia in Italian colonialism and its aftermaths has increased exponentially. Scholars such as Angelo Del Boca, Gian Paolo Calchi Novati, Nicola Labanca, Patrizia Palumbo, Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, and Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, have produced volumes that have come to belong to the canon of Italian postcolonial theory.²⁴ Filmmakers, literary authors, and visual artist alike have addressed Italian colonialism and its consequences in a relatively vast body of work.²⁵ Newspaper articles dedicated to these works of art brought the topic to an

²² Giacomo Lichtner, *Fascism in Italian Cinema Since 1945. The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 102.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Patrizia Palumbo (ed.), *A Place in the Sun. Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from the Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2003). Many more recent publications could be added to this list, including Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh and Anna Scacchi (ed.), *Parlare di razza. La lingua del colore tra Italia e Stati Uniti* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2012), Leonardo De Franceschi, *L’Africa in Italia. Per una contro storia postcoloniale del cinema italiano* (Rome: Aracne, 2013), and Gaia Giuliani (ed.), *Il colore della nazione* (Milan: Mondadori, 2015).

²⁵ Cristina Ali Farah, Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, Igiaba Scego, Gabriella Ghermandi, and Amara Lakhous belong to a long list of literary authors who have published on the topic; for a recent overview, cfr. Maria

even broader audience.²⁶ This, together with theoretical and methodological challenges of the field that are described below, recently led Sandra Ponzanesi to question – as a rhetorical practice – the validity of a specific Italian branch of postcolonial theory.²⁷

Postcolonial theory, particularly when focused on the national, certainly leaves space for critical demur. The prefix ‘post’, according to some, suggesting that colonialism is of the past and no longer impacts the present, a reinforcement of the imperial notion of nation states, and a Eurocentric perspective, all add to the paradoxical nature of this academic approach.²⁸ A transnational perspective in

Grazia Negro, *Il mondo, il grido, la parola. La questione linguistica nella letteratura postcoloniale italiana* (Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2015), in particular the introduction, pp. 11-17. Cfr. Daniele Comberiati, *Scrivere nella lingua dell'altro: la letteratura degli immigrati in Italia (1989-2007)* (Brussels: PIE-Lang, 2010), Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries. Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013). Filmmakers on the topic include Gianni Amelio (*Lamerica*, 1994), Cristina Comencini (*Bianco e nero*, 2008), Claudio Noce (*Good Morning Aman*, 2009), Emmanuele Crialese (*Terraferma*, 2011), Andrea Segre, Dagmawi Yimer, and Riccardo Biadene (*Come un uomo sulla terra*, 2008), Simone Brioni, Graziano Chiscuzzu, and Ermanno Guida (*Aulò and La quarta via*, 2012), and Alan Maglio and Medhin Paolos (*Asmarina*, 2015). Cfr. Gianmarco Mancosu, ‘Asmara, the Past in the Present. Echoes of Colonial Presence in Documentaries on Mobility’, in *Asmara – Colonial City and Postcolonial Experiences*, ed. by P. Volgger and S. Graf (Berlin: DOM, 2017), pp. 327-35.

²⁶ See, for instance, *La Repubblica* on the documentary *Asmarina* on 7 May, 2015, in which the word ‘postcoloniale’ is used:

<http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/volontariato/2015/05/07/news/_asmarina_un_angolo_di_corno_d_africa_a_milano-113807054/> [accessed 26 November 2017].

²⁷ Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Does Italy Need Postcolonial Theory?’ (2016).

²⁸ Cfr. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), Ella Shoat, ‘Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial’’, in *Social Text* 31/32 (1992), 99– 113, Jean-François Bayart, ‘Postcolonial Studies. A Political Invention of Tradition?’, *Public Culture*, 23.1 (2011), 55– 84. The terms of ‘neo-colonialism’, neo-imperialism’, and ‘cultural imperialism’ are sometimes used instead

order to examine aftermaths of colonial narratives, among which various forms of oppression, including racism – for instance, from a Pan-African, Critical white Studies, or Black Studies standpoint – is therefore often desirable;²⁹ to paraphrase Philomena Essed, Europe is turning Black, and a transnational approach creates the opportunity to unite activists, artists, and scholars.³⁰ However, there are cases in which this kind of approach does not suffice in order to reach the core of the

of postcolonialism. The ‘post’ prefix, however, also implies a distance from which to reflect critically upon what went before, and on its inescapable role in what comes after; as such, recognizing the complicity of new forms of thinking in the practices and values which they claim to reject.

²⁹ ‘Black Studies, which is also called Africana Studies, is the critical and systematic study of the thought and practice of African people in their current and historical unfolding.’ Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Black Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 148.

Neocolonialism was a term coined by Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, and the leading exponent of pan-Africanism in his *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). ‘This title, which echoed Lenin’s definition of imperialism as the last stage of capitalism, suggested that, although countries like Ghana had achieved political independence, the excolonial powers and the newly emerging superpowers such as the United States continued to play a decisive role in their cultures and economies through new instruments of indirect control such as international monetary bodies, through the power of multinational corporations and cartels which artificially fixed prices in world markets, and through a variety of other educational and cultural NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations)’. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin (ed), *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 146. Finally, ‘[p]an-Africanism is frequently defined as: “an intellectual movement conceived by people of African descent mainly in Africa in the Caribbean and in the USA” (Christopher, “Caribbean Studies International Traditions”), and one that: “consciously and deliberately attempts to create bonds of solidarity based upon a commonality of fate imposed by the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its aftermath”.’ Omotayo Oloruntoba-Oju, ‘Pan Africanism, Myth and History in African and Caribbean Drama’, *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.5, no.8, (2012), 190-209; 191.

³⁰ Philomena Essed, in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, ed. by Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. ix. Birmingham City University created the first Black Studies BA programme in Europe in 2017.

specific problems a particular society as a whole, and racialised subjects within individually, suffer from.³¹

The medium of film can be an excellent point of entry into imaginaries of *italianità* (as is argued above through the discussion surrounding the *italiani brava gente* myth) and (Black) Otherness, tracing origins of racialising thought, both because of its wide reach, and because of its ‘unimedial’ quality, a term I borrow from James Monaco: a unified language created only in film, of spoken and/or written words, audio (music, voices, background sounds and silences) and the visual (frames, movement, spaces), creating the possibility of taking into consideration all these aspects combined, when analysing constructions of national identities.³² The following example accentuates the significance of a focus on the national in relation to cinematographic signs. Three icons of Italian and international cinema, Sophia Loren, Totò, and Vittorio Gassman, in *Aida* (Clemente Fracassi, 1953), *Tototruffa 62* (Camillo Mastrocinque, 1962), and *I*

³¹ Publications that discuss being Black in Italy today, include Mauro Valeri, *Black Italians. Atleti neri in maglia azzurra. L'Italia Multirazziale* (Rome: Palombi Editori, 2006); Mauro Valeri, *Negro, ebreo, comunista: Alessandro Sinigaglia, venti anni in lotta contra il fascismo* (Rome: Odradek, 2010); Pap Khouma, *Noi italiani neri: storie di ordinario razzismo* (Milan: B.C. Dalai, 2010); Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh and Anna Scacchi (ed.), *Parlare di razza. La lingua del colore tra Italia e Stati Uniti* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2012); Gaia Giuliani (ed.), *Il colore della nazione* (Milan: Mondadori, 2015).

³² James Monaco argues that the term ‘multi-media’ suggests that film is not a medium in itself, hence he proposes to use the term ‘unimedial’ instead. ‘This’, he argues, ‘would focus our attention on the job at hand: to produce a unified experience, communicating thoughts and feelings, using whichever information formats work best’. James Monaco, *How to Read A Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond Art, Technology, Language, History, Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, repr. 2009). See on cinema’s wide range, Masolino D’Amico, *La commedia all’italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008).

mostri (Dino Risi, 1963) respectively, all performed in blackface.³³ These actors, having shaped the construction of the Italian cultural heritage (particularly Sophia Loren) were, and continue to be, symbols of the imaginary of *italianità* both in Italy and abroad.³⁴ However, their blackface is not mentioned in Italian media or literature, both at the time, or today. The discussion on the problematic practice of blackface has taken place in countries outside of Italy, and I am aware of merely one existing study on the topic in the Italian language, which deals with Italian pre-World War II cinema: in ‘Fantasmi d’Africa. Dal muto al sonoro. Facce, faccette, e blackface’, Maria Coletti uses the English term blackface in her Italian text on the topic.³⁵ Using the term blackface as a cultural reference point in order to point out a pattern, and a tradition of racism, is therefore not possible in an Italian context. When Gianluca Buonanno, MP of the *Lega Nord*, put black paint

³³ In chapter one, I further discuss Monica Vitti’s blackface performance in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *L’eclisse* (1962). Karen Pinkus, ‘Empty Spaces. Decolonization in Italy’, in *A Place in the Sun*, ed by Patrizio Palumbo (2003), pp. 299-320. For further reading on the cultural phenomenon of blackface, cfr. William John Mahar, *Behind the burnt cork mask: early blackface minstrelsy and antebellum American popular culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult and Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2014).

³⁴ Pauline Small, *Sophia Loren: Moulding the Star* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), Italo Moscati, *Sophia Loren: la storia dell’ultima diva* (Turin: Lindau, 2005), Antonella Palmieri, ‘Sophia Loren and the Healing Power of Female Italian Ethnicity in Grumpier Old Men’, in *Lasting Film Stars. Images that Fade and Personas that Endure*, ed. by Lucy Bolton and Julie Lobalzo Wright (London: Palgrave MacMilan, 2016), pp. 27-40, Ennio Bispuri, *Totò: principe clown* (Naples: Guida, 1997), Franca Faldini and Goffredo Fofi, *Totò: l’uomo e la maschera* (Naples: L’Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2000), Giacomo Gambetti, *Vittorio Gassman* (Rome: Gremese, 1999).

³⁵ Maria Coletti, ‘Fantasmi d’Africa. Dal muto al sonoro. Facce, faccette, e blackface’, in *L’Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. by Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013), pp. 75-92.

on his face in parliament in 2014, the description in Italian media was simply that: ‘si tinge la faccia di nero’.³⁶ No reference was made to other occurrences of this phenomenon, inside, or outside of Italy. In 2017, when comedian Dado (Gabriele Pellegrini) performed in blackface in a satire video while singing in broken Italian about having bombs in his backpack, and mimicking a foreign accent, Italian mainstream media remained predominantly quiet. A popular blog on art and pop culture, *Griot*, posted a slightly altered translation of an American text by Declan Eytan on the matter, in which the term blackface was used. Whereas no specification to its origins was made in the original text, the Italian translation describes it as an American tradition.³⁷ The possibility that a similar (possibly common) practice in popular culture could be found in Italy, is thus negated. Here, racism is displaced to the United States: ‘Il razzismo? Non *ci* riguarda’.³⁸ This denial parallels the displacement of Italy’s colonial past as discussed above.

Is this a problem of language (i.e. an Italian word for blackface simply does not exist), a lack of theory on the matter (which forces one to refer to the English word or tradition, a denial similar to *italiani brava gente*), or is an Italian person doing blackface culturally distinctive from, in this case, the American version, in need of its own Italian description, research, and definition? Most likely, it is a combination of these possibilities, which illustrates nevertheless the need to specify and contextualise cases of manifestations of racism. To answer

³⁶ See, for instance, <http://www.huffingtonpost.it/2014/01/15/buonanno-tinge-faccia-nero-video_n_4603809.html> [accessed 26 November 2017].

³⁷ <<http://griotmag.com/it/forbes-la-faccia-dipinta-di-nero-del-comico-dado-la-dice-lunga-su-societa-e-mass-media-italiani/>> [accessed 26 November 2017].

³⁸ Giuseppe Faso in Tatiana Petrovich Njegosh and Anna Scacchi (ed.), *Parlare di razza. La lingua del colore tra Italia e Stati Uniti* (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2012), p. 8, emphasis of the author.

Ponzanesi's question of whether 'Italy' still needs postcolonial theory, I therefore answer that 'it' does – as does Ponzanesi, at the end of her article. Concentrating specifically on the notion of *italianità*, this research, therefore, is situated within the tension between on the one hand the desire to approach matters from a decolonizing, transnational perspective, and on the other hand the reality of the geopolitical, sociolinguistic, and cultural boundaries between the imagined communities, affecting subjects in specific contexts in a particular manner.³⁹ I aspire to add to the transnational corpus of research that deals with similar topics, in order to give way to research with a comparative point of view at a later stage.

What makes Italy specifically interesting or relevant for a focus on notions of Blackness, the insider/outsider binary, and postcolonial theory? Italian colonialism, as colonialism of other European nation states, was accompanied by discourses about racial difference, whereas Philomena Essed observes that 'each [...] member state [of the European Union] looks the other way: racism might be out *there*, somewhere else, but never *here*, not in their own country', reflecting the *italiani brava gente* narrative, and the denial of an Italian trope of Blackface.⁴⁰ As is the case with many European nation states, the heterogeneous reality of Italy does not correspond to the homogeneous notion of *italianità*. Stefano Allievi points out that Italy is 'normally considered a monocultural and monoreligious country', even though 'immigration [...] is increasingly important, statistically, and in terms of changes produced in society', illustrating that the self-image of

³⁹ With the notion of 'imagined communities', I refer to Benedict Anderson's definition of the modern nation state. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, repr. 2006).

⁴⁰ Philomena Essed, in Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (ed), *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. ix, emphasis of the author.

many Italian citizens does not correspond to their cultural reality.⁴¹ From ca. 2009 onwards, the problems concerning the illegal entrance of ‘extracomunitari’ in Southern Italy, particularly in Lampedusa, which has become the topos of this humanitarian tragedy, have been covered by main stream media, and addressed by politicians all around the world. Referring to this so-called ‘refugee crisis’, Alessandra Di Maio introduced the term ‘Black Mediterranean’, arguing that this crisis – which, as she points out, started long before 2009 – is largely a tragedy of Black bodies. Moreover, with the introduction of this term, she intends to resignify history by including Black subjects into the Italian Mediterranean imaginary. As she argues, Black bodies are marginalised from the Italian narration as ‘outsiders’.⁴²

The dominant historical narrative of ‘Italy’ is not void of Black subjects – Alessandro De’ Medici, Othello, Black *burattini*, Black saints (predominantly in Sardinia and Sicily), and more recently, African-American soldiers in Italian films about World War II, Black politicians, athletes, and artists, have been part of, and are currently shaping, the narrative of ‘Italy’.⁴³ However, political discourse and

⁴¹ Stefano Allievi, ‘Immigration and Cultural Plurism in Italy: Multiculturalism as a Missing Model’, in *Italian Culture*, vol. xxviii (2010), 85-103 (p. 85).

⁴² Cfr. Alessandra Di Maio, ‘Black Italia: Contemporary Migrant Writers from Africa’, *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, ed. by Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, Stephen Small (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), pp. 119-44.

⁴³ F. Scoza Barcellona, ‘I santi neri di Sicilia’, in *Schiavitù religione e libertà nel Mediterraneo tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. by G. Fiume (Cosenza: Pellegrini, 2008), pp. 163-77, Mauro Valeri, *Black Italians* (2006), Shelleen Greene, ‘Buffalo Soldiers on Film. *Il soldato afroamericano nel cinema neorealista e postbellico italiano*’, in *L’Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. by Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013), pp. 93-108, Gaia Giuliani (ed), *Il colore della nazione* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2016), all essays.

certain specific policies, journalistic language and priorities, and isolated but striking incidents of violence and exclusion, indicate that significant sectors of the Italian population seem to ignore this. Analysing cases of racism in Italian political discourse, pamphlets, and popular novels of the last twenty years (such as Roberto Saviano's *Gomorrah*), Alessandro Dal Lago concludes that 'the hostility toward underprivileged or marginalized foreigners (migrants, Rom, etc.) is (...) is an integral part of the cultural, political public discourse, and is therefore to a certain extent socially legitimate.'⁴⁴ Indeed,

[a]longside the explicit racism of certain political parties in the government, we find an insidious, implicit racism of societal institutions, [while] even the language of anti-racism often includes the image of the infantile, subordinated foreigner.⁴⁵

Some Italian citizens seem to have forgotten that they themselves have long been a migrant people, both internally – as a consequence of the *boom economico* of the 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of southern Italians moved to the northern big cities, where they felt marginalised, and alienated from 'their land' – and abroad – until the mid-1970s Italy was officially a country of emigration, with many citizens moving to the US and northern European nation states.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Alessandro Dal Lago, 'Italy's Unmentionable Racism. Reflections on the Image of Foreigners in Italian Culture', in *New Perspective in Italian Studies, Vol. 1: Definitions, Theory, and Accented Practices*, ed. by Graziella Parati (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), pp. 154-166 (p. 154).

⁴⁵ Alessandro Dal Lago, 'Italy's Unmentionable Racism' (2012), p. 164.

⁴⁶ Norma Bouchard, 'Reading the Discourse of Multicultural Italy: Promises and Challenges of Transnational Italy in an Era of Global Migration', in *Italian Culture*, vol. 28.2 (2010), 104-20, Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000). See on this topic Shelleen Greene's

Arriving in large groups in the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century, Italians themselves were considered Black; as the African American deejay Chuck Nice put it: ‘Italians are niggaz with short memories.’⁴⁷ The film *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (Luchino Visconti, 1960) attests to the internal north-south dichotomy, with Southerners treated like ‘Africans’.⁴⁸ This dichotomy is described by Antonio Gramsci as *la questione meridionale*, producing with his prison notes one of, if not the, foundational text(s) of postcolonial theory in the beginning of the last century.⁴⁹ Referring to *la questione meridionale* and the strong disparities between the north and south of Italy, Shelleen Greene recognises in Italian films after World War II in the figure of the *meticcio*, or mixed-race character,

a trope for the country’s negotiation of its internal racial heterogeneity that continues to the present day. The representations of mixed-race subjects in the Italian cinema not only mark shifts in the definition of “race” and “nation” that have circulated within the country since the late nineteenth century, but also reveal the failure of these categories to secure stable racial and national identities for a given historical period.⁵⁰

introduction to *Equivocal Subjects*. On the *boom economico*, see below, and cfr. Valerio Castronovo, 1960. *Il miracolo economico* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 2008), Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato: dal miracolo economico agli anni ottanta* (Rome: Donzini, 2003).

⁴⁷ Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White? How Race Is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 1. Cfr. John Foot, *Modern Italy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 139.

⁴⁸ Cfr. Jane Schneider, *Italy’s “Southern Question”. Orientalism in One Country* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1998).

⁴⁹ Antonio Gramsci, Pasquale Verdicchio, *The Southern Question* (New York: Bordighera Press, 2015).

⁵⁰ Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), p. 3.

With mixed-race subjects, Greene refers first and foremost to ‘persons who are of both Italian and African heritage, including those who emerged from Italy’s colonial enterprises in North and East Africa (...), and persons of Italian and African American decent born during the World War II period’ (p. 3). However, she also discusses in broader terms the discursive construction of ‘blackness’ in Italian cinema, and includes in her study the use of blackface for the Maciste character in *Cabiria* (Giovanni Pastrone, 1914), the ‘ape woman’ in *La donna scimmia* (Marco Ferreri, 1964) as a reference to African postcolonial subjects in Italy, and Pasolini’s ‘interventions against the loss of the *diverso*’, a kind of ‘global suproletariat’, which refers just as much to rural southerners (and northerners) and African-Italian subjects. Including in her corpus more recent films, such as *Bianco e nero* (2008), and *Gomorra* (2008), she concludes her argument with stating that ‘Italian cinema reveals how the unstable categories of “citizen” and “non-citizen” are continuously negotiated and redefined’.⁵¹

All of these factors emphasise the complicated, specifically Italian reality, which is not isolated, but part of various geographical, political, and ideological regions, identities, and imaginaries (both in-, and outside of its own geographical borders): it is part of Europe, of the Mediterranean, of the South, of the West, and of the North, depending on one’s perspective. Italy, however, occupies a marginalised position in most of these cases: it is considered the South of Europe, and the South of ‘the Western world’; it is merely the centre of Mussolini’s never achieved second Roman empire. Following Shelleen Greene, Italy therefore occupies in many contexts a position of in-betweenness.

This study is to be found at the intersection of Postcolonial Theory,

⁵¹ Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), p. 265.

Cultural Studies, Critical Race Studies, Film Studies, Gender Theory, and Italian Studies, as I aim to investigate how cinematographic constructions, reconfigurations, and/or comments and critique on the notion of (white) *italianità* and its (layers of) Black Otherness are negotiated in four films that I identify as *commedie all'italiana*, namely *Lo sceicco bianco* (Federico Fellini, 1952), *Il moralista* (Giorgio Bianchi, 1959), *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (Luciano Salce, Eduardo De Filippo, Marco Ferreri, 1965), and *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1968), while I discuss *Io la conoscevo bene* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965) in chapter one, and *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1973) in the concluding chapter. After a close-reading analysis, taking into account the unimedial characteristics of cinema, and focusing on the unified language of the combination of words, audio, and the visual, I take into consideration the historical and theoretical contexts of the films. During the analyses, I concentrate specifically on the appearance of the character of the Black Other. The overall plots of the films are of secondary importance, as I describe these predominantly to support the analysis of the appearance of this character. I am also less interested in the intention of the filmmakers (if such a thing is even traceable or definable) as I follow Roland Barthes' questioning of the "author-God"'s authority over the decisive meaning of a (filmic) text, and am more interested in the structure of the films, which brings to the fore certain patterns.⁵²

The close-reading of the films is therefore based on a combination of 'disciplines', a problematic term in itself as many of the theories I apply are

⁵² Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and trans.

by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-48.

transdisciplinary, deconstructing or problematizing the limitations of ‘disciplines’ as a concept, paralleling the disputable notion of strict national boundaries, and genre distinctions. I apply film theory, as I follow the unimedial language theory by James Monaco as discussed above, I take into account Rey Chow’s question of ‘How do they show themselves?’, since it raises questions about representation and belonging, and I focus on the notion of the grotesque as described by Roberto De Gaetano, who in turn refers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque. The question posed by Rey Chow, an Asian American female scholar, is particularly relevant for this study, since the phrase raises questions surrounding visibility, the politics of identification, referentiality, and subjectivity in terms of historical, cultural, and geographical context.⁵³ As argued by Paul Bowman, this is one of the explanations for why many film scholars have come to focus on what he describes as ‘group cultures’.⁵⁴ I also discuss in detail Andrea Bini and Natalie Fullwood’s recent publications on the *commedia all’italiana*, as they both discuss this notion (or as they also call it, Comedy, Italian Style) and its portrayals of gender difference (and occasionally other kinds of difference). Critical Race Studies is represented by Sara Ahmed’s *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Nirmal Puwar’s *Space Invaders. Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place*, Richard Dyer’s *White*, and Pierre-André Taguieff’s notion of heteroreferential racism.⁵⁵ I use Sara Ahmed’s notion of ‘stranger fetishism’,

⁵³ Paul Bowman, ‘Introduction’, in Rey Chow, *The Rey Chow Reader*, ed. by Paul Bowman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), ebook.

⁵⁴ Paul Bowman in Rey Chow, *The Rey Chow Reader*.

⁵⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality* (London: Routledge 2000), Richard Dyer, *White* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders. Race, Gender and*

referring to Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, when describing portrayals of Black Others, and Richard Dyer's accounts of representations of whiteness in western culture's artefacts. With the concept of the Space Invader, or the 'body out of place', Puwar refers to 'different bodies' that are not the 'somatic norm' in a specific site, which is fitting for descriptions of *italianità* and Otherness in the films.⁵⁶ Taguieff's notion of heteroreferential racism refers back to Lacan's idea discussed above of the dependence of an Other in order to construct a sense of subjective experience: heteroreferential racism is based on the necessity of an Other in order to establish the notion of the self.⁵⁷ Postcolonial Theory publications I refer to include Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, Spivak's question of whether the subaltern can speak, bell hooks' study on race, class, and sex in film, and Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop's analysis of racism in Italy connected to its colonial past.⁵⁸ Gender theory is represented by Judith Butler and her definition of the notion of resignification, Eve Sedgwick's critique on the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality dominating European 20th century thinking, Jacqueline Reich, Sergio Rigoletto, and Andrea Bini's

Bodies Out of Place (New York: Berg, 2004), Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero*.

Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani (Milan: Le Monnier, 2013).

⁵⁶ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders* (2004), p. 1.

⁵⁷ Cfr. Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani* (Milan: Le Monnier, 2013), pp. 5-6. Cfr. Étienne Balibar and Emmanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London, New York: Verso, 1991), p. 21.

⁵⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, repr. 2008), Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in Carly Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (ed.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1988), bell hooks, *Reel to Real. Race, Class and Sex at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, repr. 2009), Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani* (Milan: Le Monnier, 2013).

problematization of the notion of masculinity in *commedie all'italiana*, represented by the concept of the *inetto* (Reich).⁵⁹

Shelleen Greene's *Equivocal Subjects. Between Italy and Africa.*

Constructions of Racial and National Identity in the Italian Cinema is a core text for this study, and its title rightfully illustrates similar research aspirations. The introduction to her work is a brilliant account of the Italian postcolonial reality and its hiatuses, together with an illustration of the importance of cinema for a study of this kind. Below, I aspire to add to the corpus introduced in her study, through centralizing the binary opposition of Blackness and whiteness, created (imagined) by *italiani medi* in a more specific group of films – namely, *commedie all'italiana* – and in a more specific time frame – namely, 1952-1968/73.

Leonardo De Franceschi's *L'Africa in Italia* offers an excellent overview of 'the experience of filmmakers of African birth or descent, practitioners in any way involved in Italian film industry and culture, from the silent era up to the present day', to which I also refer.⁶⁰

Finally, my approach to the four films analysed below is similar to Christopher Wagstaff's analysis of three neorealist films, which he presents as a

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1999), Sara Salih, 'Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification', in *The Judith Butler Reader*, ed. by Sara Salih (Maldon, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover. Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), Sergio Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶⁰ This description comes from his website, <<http://www.cinemafradiscendente.com/it/our-project>> [accessed 26 November 2017]. Cfr. Leonardo De Franceschi, *L'Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano* (Rome: Aracne, 2013).

study on neorealism.⁶¹ I use the inductive approach, instead of a top-down approach, starting my research by looking at how the films are constructed, made, assembled. Only after an in-depth analysis, I consider the historical, artistic, philosophical, and economic context. My point of departure is similar to what Wagstaff considers the basis of his study:

Any knowledge about the society and culture which produced that artefact, any knowledge of the discourse recoverable from the artefact, and any sense of the film as one moment in the process of filmmaking and film viewing have all to derive from an apprehension of that artefact. To make that apprehension itself derive from one of the other, secondary, kinds of knowledge hypothetically retrievable from the artefact is to put the cart before the horse.

If one intends to grasp the (cinematographic) construction of an ‘Italian identity’ and non-Italian Others, the films described as *commedia all’italiana* seem to be a crucial corpus to take into consideration. After Alberto Sordi’s death, national newspapers declared him, as the actor par excellence of the *commedia all’italiana*, the ultimate interpreter of *italianità*, illustrating how closely representation is incorporated into a perception of reality, emphasising Rey Chow’s question surrounding representation and subjectivity.⁶² Scholars describe the recurring protagonist of the *commedia all’italiana* as the *italiano medio*.⁶³ The label - identified as ‘one of the most, or perhaps *the* most, popular Italian film

⁶¹ Christopher Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema. An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), ebook.

⁶² Silvana Patriarca, ‘Introduction’, in *Italianità: La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Rome: Editori Laterza, 2011), ebook.

⁶³ Cfr. Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità* (2011), ebook.

genres of all time' - suggests that what is portrayed in the films can be summed up as 'the comedy that is Italy', or the 'comical reality that is Italy', or the brand of comedy that is identifiably Italian for Italians.⁶⁴ If we interpret the label in this light, the question arises of what the makers chose to depict in order to make viewers laugh, and to what end: what is the specific role of comedy within the depiction of the *italiano medio*? *Commedia all'italiana* director Dino Risi described the *commedia all'italiana* as 'il modo italiano di fare commedia'.⁶⁵ What was considered humorous by a presumed 'Italian audience', and what was presented as its 'taboos'? And what, therefore, was considered 'typically Italian' by 'Italians'?

The heyday of the *commedie all'italiana* is dated between the 1950s-1970s, which more or less coincides with the years of the *boom economico*. This period of sudden growth from a predominantly rural society into a global industrial nation state changed the outlook of the peninsula and the habits of its citizens drastically, 'transform[ing] Italian society largely along the lines of (...) capitalism and consumerism.'⁶⁶ It made for interesting new film topics related to work and leisure time, including commodities, money, marriage, and traditional gender roles. The satirical (though generally not considered a *commedia*

⁶⁴ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film: Comedy, Italian Style* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p. 1. A significant part of *commedie all'italiana* was shown in theatres outside of Italy as well. Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style: The Golden Age of Italian Film Comedies* (London: Continuum, 2008). However, I argue below that the films were first and foremost made for Italian audiences.

⁶⁵ Aldo Viganò, *Storia del cinema: Commedia italiana in cento film* (Genova: Le Mani, 1995), p. 13.

⁶⁶ Frank Burke (ed), *A Companion to Italian Cinema* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), xxii. On the *boom economico*, cfr. Valerio Castronovo, *1960* (2008), Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato* (2003).

all'italiana) and internationally acclaimed *Il posto* (Ermanno Olmi, 1961) for instance, tells the story of young adult Domenico (Domenico Cantoni) who goes to Milan from the countryside to find a job at a large cooperation, has to go through a large amount of exams and psychological tests, and becomes so absorbed with his career that he fails to nurture a relationship with his love interest Antonietta. The new context of the *boom economico* in which life was organised around work and the industrial society, preoccupies the protagonists in many films of this period to such a degree that issues such as the lost war and colonies, and possible consequences, or echoes, of the Fascist ideology and/or imperial narratives, seemingly disappear in the background.

However, the decades after World War II constitute a crucial period for a construction, negotiation and redefinition both in film and in other media, of a new sense of a (white) *italianità*, 'cleaned up' or cleared from the Fascist ideology – we can think back to Lichtner's observation of how Italian subjects were portrayed in neorealist films. Liliana Ellena argues that the decade between 1945 and 1955 was the period in which the relationship had to be redefined between the two dimensions of the lost of the colonies and the re-emergence of what she describes as the 'questione razziale': racial difference as defined by Fascist ideologies.⁶⁷ Through an analysis of Italian medical and hygiene manuals between the 1930s-1960s, Cristina Lombardi-Diop concludes that whiteness became a trope in order to create a homogenous imaginary of *italianità*.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Liliana Ellena, 'Geografie della razza nel cinema italiano del primo dopoguerra 1945-1955', in *Il colore della nazione* ed. by Gaia Giuliani (Milan: Mondadori, 2015), pp. 17-31 (p. 17).

⁶⁸ Cristina Lombardi-Diop, 'L'Italia cambia pelle. La bianchezza degli italiani dal Fascismo al boom economico', in *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani*, ed. by Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop (Milan: Le Monnier, 2013), pp. 67-116 (pp. 68, 115).

Therefore, the question of what the notion of Blackness constitutes in these specific films, contrasted to a (possibly, specifically Italian, Mediterranean, or in-between) whiteness, becomes all the more pivotal. Does a ‘persistence of “othering”’ manifest itself, and if so, how?⁶⁹ In what form are Italy’s colonial enterprises discussed, if at all? How is it possible to recognise in the Black characters a challenge to resignify *italianità*, the Italian colonial past, and/or imperial notions of ‘race’? Is there any possibility to reconsider the particular films of this corpus therefore as ‘Black film’, as intended by Gillespie? What would this implicate for the scholarly works suggesting that Italian postcolonial critique generally starting in the 1990s - in other words, could we, in some cases, speak of an echo of the *italiani brava gente* myth in scholarship? Which constructed binaries, such as Black/white, metropole/margin, genre/*auteur*, and comedy/drama, have impeded nuance on these matters? And, finally, in which ways could this inform us about, or relocate, resignify, or challenge, current Italian, and transnational echoes of imperial aspirations?

The four films that form the corpus of this research were chosen after formulating a set of criteria. As a contrast to other studies on the *commedia all’italiana*, I decided to identify a small group of films which I could consequentially analyse in depth. It was first and foremost crucial to acknowledge the films as *commedie all’italiana*. All films contain all characteristics of this filmic approach as outlined in chapter two. Then, (a) Black Other(s) had to occur more than once, possibly portrayed as a stereotype, since ‘a stereotype can be

⁶⁹ Philomena Essed discusses the principle of a ‘persistence of “othering”’ in a European, political, and cultural context, in *Black Europe and the African Diaspora*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. ix.

complex, varied, intense and contradictory',⁷⁰ and/or play a pivotal role in the plot. This Black Other, physically, sonically, or behaviourally contrasted to characters that are presented as Italians, could be a (famous) Italian (male) actor who presents himself as such (by performing in blackface) or who is perceived by Italians as such (as is the case in *Lo sceicco bianco* and *Riusciranno i nostri eroi*), or s/he could be a marginalised Black person who is not interpreted by a famous actor, and whose Blackness is not enhanced through blackface (*Il moralista*, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, *Amarcord*). Moreover, the films had to fill the gap between the immediate years after World War II and the period which is often considered the beginning of Italian postcolonial theory. More specifically, I wanted them to cover the time frame between ca. 1950-1970, since these are the years in which the decolonisation of Africa took place, bringing to the fore international discussions about colonialism. As argued above, these two decades are also considered the heyday of the *commedia all'italiana*. Furthermore, I searched for films that each had a few years between them, in order to acknowledge possible developments or changes in the portrayal of the character of the Black Other over a time frame of approximately twenty years. Finally, I intend to discuss the complex, at times contradictory discursivity of Blackness, and therefore I chose films which cover this complexity; These films communicate different facets of Black Otherness, and as such, illustrate specific spectacle shifts. With different facets of Blackness, I refer to the unstable characteristics of the categories of (racial, gender, class, and sexuality) 'difference' as opposed to the notion of *italianità*. With spectacle shifts, I refer to the changing positioning of *italiani*

⁷⁰ Richard Dyer, *cit.* in *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*, ed. by Yvonne Tasker (London, New York: Routledge, 1998), ebook version.

medi as opposed to a seemingly ‘obvious’ manifestation of (racial, etc.) difference.

In order to find these films, I spent three months in the *cineteca* of *Centro sperimentale* in Rome, where I watched a large amount of films considered *commedie all’italiana*, in order to identify a list of films that met these criteria. There will be *commedie all’italiana* that are not included in their collection and are untraceable online, which could have been included in this project. This does not matter on a fundamental level for the scope of this research, as it is not an exhaustive study: I do not analyse the *commedia all’italiana*, but a specific subgroup of films that, given the criteria mentioned above, fit perfectly in the scope of this research, namely, to explore the discursivity of Blackness and Otherness.

Next to the corpus outlined above, the list of *commedie all’italiana* that fit the principles of this research, included *Un turco napoletano* (Mario Mattoli, 1953), *Totòtruffa* (Camillo Mastrocinque, 1961), *La donna scimmia* (Marco Ferreri 1964), *Casanova ’70* (Mario Monicelli, 1965), and *Il giovane normale* (Dino Risi, 1969). In order to offer an in-depth, qualitative analysis of a few selected films, I decided to narrow the research down to four films. The films mentioned above were disqualified for a variety of reasons. The first two are films that are considered ‘Totò films’, which could be considered a group on its own, possibly not *commedie all’italiana*. *La donna scimmia* has been analysed thoroughly by Shelleen Greene, and her analysis would make mine superfluous.⁷¹ I saw in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* of the same year as *Casanova ’70*, a more complete, and varied, account of the notion of the Black Other. *Il giovane normale*, finally, is made only one year after *Riusciranno?*, and for similar reasons as between the former two films, I preferred *Riusciranno?*.

⁷¹ Shelleen Greene, Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), pp. 92-101.

Many versions exist of the films that I analyse in the following chapters, for national and international audiences, directors' cuts, and in various DVD formats. I refer to the DVD versions that belong to the collection of the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia* in Rome for the time and format indications provided in the following chapters.

There are many other films in which Black Others occur – as is illustrated in other studies on this topic. The group of films in which (a) Black Other(s) is/are mentioned or showed only briefly, is quite large. Films of this group include *Proibito rubare* (Luigi Comencini, 1948), *Persiane chiuse* (Luigi Comencini, 1951), *Amori di mezzo secolo* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1954), *Tutti a casa* (Luigi Comencini, 1960), *Adua e le sue compagne* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1960), *La parmigiana* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1963), *I mostri* [episode *Othello*] (Dino Risi, 1963), *La mia signora* [episode *Eritrea*] (Luigi Comencini, 1964), *Io la conoscevo bene* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965), *Lo scopone scientifico* (Luigi Comencini, 1972), and *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* (Ettore Scola, 1976). In the following chapters, I refer to these films occasionally as an illustration of the main supposition, just as I refer to films in which you would expect a Black Other to occur, but (s)he does not appear. This is the case with, among others, *Souvenir d'Italie* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1957), *Made in Italy* (Nanni Loy, 1965), *In nome del popolo italiano* (Dino Risi, 1971), and *Chiedo asilo* (Marco Ferreri, 1979). I also refer to various other publications which discuss *commedie* or contemporary films in relation to otherness and/or colonialism.

Lo sceicco bianco and *Amarcord* set the time frame of the corpus as earliest and latest films to be included. These two films are both considered *auteur* films according to critics, as opposed to *genre* films, to which, according

to this critical binary, the *commedia all'italiana* belongs. I intend to deconstruct this binary, by illustrating that *Lo sceicco bianco* and *Amarcord*, made by the *auteur* par excellence Federico Fellini, meet all *commedia all'italiana* criteria as discussed by most scholars and critics (see chapter two). This is why I include two films directed by Fellini in the corpus of this study; the questions I ask surrounding the notions of genre and auteur are troubling a national imaginary of cultural unity and cohesion, and therefore cross the assumed boundaries between filmmakers, filmmaking practices, and film audiences, which are used to categorize popular/genre and art/*auteur* production.

There are many ways to define the 'Other'. As Derek Duncan argues, 'cinema deploys geographies of the abject body as a prime metaphorical resource in the articulation of difference'.⁷² In my analysis of the corpus outlined above, I concentrate on the representation of the Black Other, not by focusing on the essentialist principles of the skin colour or country of origin of the actors, which is one of the points of critique I have concerning Leonardo De Franceschi's study mentioned above.⁷³ Rather, I intend to point out a constructed otherness through physically, behaviourally, or sonically distinguishing characters which mark characters as different from the 'Italians', who as such, seem white in comparison. In the films discussed in the following chapters, this is accomplished in various ways.

Five thematic tropes, *romanità*, Catholicism/the Catholic Church, prostitution, food, and *fare bella figura*, can be found in the vast majority of films

⁷² Derek Duncan, "Italy's Postcolonial Cinema and its Histories of Representation", in: *Italian Studies*, vol. 63.2, (2008), 195-211, p. 203.

⁷³ Leonardo De Franceschi, *L'Africa in Italia* (2013).

that are considered *commedie all'italiana* by critics and scholars; I have yet to find a *commedia all'italiana* that does not explicitly discuss at least one of these themes. In the *film a episodi*, and famous *commedia all'italiana*, *I mostri* (Dino Risi, 1963), for instance, all tropes occur. Many episodes take place in Rome – for instance, in the episode *Che vitaccia!*, set in one of Rome's *borgate*, the protagonist makes his family suffer from poverty, but he does buy tickets to see his football team *Roma* play. The Catholic Church appears in the background of many scenes, and characters visit the church. Prostitution occurs in the episode *Il povero soldato*, in which the protagonist's sister, a high class prostitute, has recently died, and he tries to sell her diary with juicy details. Food is occasionally presented as a problem: in *Che vitaccia!*, the family suffers from having too little to eat. In *La strada è di tutti*, the protagonist (Vittorio Gassman) performs the role of the good citizen, *fa bella figura*, expecting others to follow the traffic rules and let him through when he crosses the street, pointing to his right as a pedestrian, and yet when he gets in his car, he drives remarkably aggressively.

Il diavolo (Gian Luigi Polidoro, 1963), describes the story of an *italiano medio* (Alberto Sordi) who goes to Stockholm on a business trip. He has in mind to make love to a Swedish woman, as he assumes they are sexually more liberated than Italian women, since they are no Catholics. In the *film a episodi* *Boccaccio '70* (1962), in Federico Fellini's episode *Le tentazioni del dottor Antonio*, a priest is haunted by an eroticized publicity poster of a woman in an evening dress promoting milk: he seeks to *fare bella figura* by keeping obscenities out of his life and out of the neighbourhood, but he is strongly affected by her sensual presence. In *Adua e le compagne* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1960) four former prostitutes try to start a restaurant after the 1958 Merlin law in Italy made brothels illegal.

However, their past occupation continues to dominate their lives, and they are forced to go back into illegal prostitution. Most films are set in Rome, and often they refer to the booming film industry and *Cinecittà*.

All tropes communicate the imaginary of *italianità*, and are intertwined with the main questions of this research. The theme of Catholicism includes issues of sexuality, family, and marriage – and, therefore, prostitution, as well. In *Il moralista*, both themes play a crucial role: The Catholic morality appears to suffocate the general secretary of the *Organizzazione Internazionale della Moralità Pubblica* (I. O. P. M.), Agostino (Alberto Sordi) who on the one hand acts ‘morally’ by prohibiting ‘improper’ nudity in films and commercials, while on the other hand, he is a woman trader. The plot becomes is complicated further when a few of these women are Black women, and one of them turns out to be a man. I particularly rely on Richard Dyer’s volumes on the social construct of ‘whiteness’ in relation to both ‘purity’, chastity, and Catholicism, for the analysis of this trope.⁷⁴

The concept of *romanità* also takes into account questions of spatiality: the metropole/capital of Rome and Italy vs. the other space/space of the other. For instance, in many scenes in which protagonists of *commedie all’italiana* go into questionable bars – outside of their normative, accepted habitat – Black Others can be identified in the background. In *La parmigiana* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1963), Black musicians are painted in the background as a mural decoration in a nightclub, while in the foreground white Italian characters play live music. In *Lo sceicco bianco*, Roman *fotoromanzo* crew members occupy a local beach outside of the metropole, aggressively forcing local beach goers to leave, echoing a

⁷⁴ Richard Dyer, *White* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997).

colonialist attitude: imperial Rome. Natalie Fullwood's study on the relationship between space and gender in the *commedia all'italiana* is a fascinating study to take into consideration.⁷⁵

I focus on the corporeal aspect of food, referring to the corporeal element of the grotesque. In his analysis of Rabelais' work, Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of the carnivalesque, which has the word 'carne' in it, literally referring to humans' flesh. The 'grotesque body' is a representation of the three spheres of the carnivalesque.⁷⁶ For example, in *Lo sceicco bianco*, male characters eat with gusto, whereas the female protagonist refuses to eat, fitting her unearthly, Madonna-like presence. Roberto De Gaetano's volume on the grotesque in Italian cinema is a crucial text for the analysis of corporality and other aspects associated with the grotesque in the *commedia all'italiana*.⁷⁷

Fare bella figura includes issues of money and poverty, which strongly relate to the *boom economico*. In *Riusciranno*, Agostino, taking a trip to Angola, continues to present himself as a 'good Italian', referring to what he reads, what he eats, and how he treats people he meets, in order to distinguish himself – in vain – from 'the locals'. I consider Andrea Bini's book on male anxiety (and performativity) in the *commedia all'italiana* a fundamental text in this context.

In examining the theme of prostitution, I take into account gender issues as well. In the abovementioned *Adua e le compagne* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1960) protagonist Adua Giovanetti, a former prostitute who has survived 'la guerra in

⁷⁵ Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space. Comedy, Italian Style* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

⁷⁶ Bakhtin in Pam Morris (ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader, Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, (London: Arnold Publishers, 1994), pp. 194-206.

⁷⁷ Roberto De Gaetano, *Il corpo e la maschera. Il grottesco nel cinema italiano* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1999).

Africa' (a reference to colonial Italian wars), attempts to start a restaurant with three other former prostitutes, but this turns out to be impossible, since the men they encounter are unable to change their view of these women, and to recognise that these women want to change their lives. Apart from *Il moralista*, the theme of prostitution, or of selling women, occurs explicitly in all films. Danielle Hipkins' work on gender and prostitution in Italian cinema between 1940-1965 is a crucial account of this notion, and I refer to her work regularly in order to examine the changing portrayal of the figure of the prostitute.

Chapter one discusses the historical context of the films, with a focus on Blackness in relation to (filmic representations of, and during) Italian colonialism, and fascism. I pay particular attention to the double silence surrounding a Black character in Antonio Pietrangeli's *Io la conoscevo bene* (1965): on the one hand, this character has not been analysed by scholars. In the character's significant and active 'silence', I recognise the 'subversive resignification', as mentioned above. By re-considering, and resignifying, this character, I intend to add to a growing corpus of studies focusing on films between the end of World War II and the late 1980s. Placing this in contemporary Italy, finally, I recognise the current necessity of a resignification of these issues in Italian (film) history. This chapter forms the basis of later film readings.

Chapter two approaches the *commedia all'italiana*, considering it a hardly definable group of films that can be considered from various angles. After I discuss one (dominating) academic tendency to consider this group of films as a historical reaction to neorealism, the chapter is divided into three main parts, as I offer an overview of a thorough literature analysis, while I discuss the questions of what is comedy, what is *italianità*, and finally, what is *commedia all'italiana*?

A deconstruction of the theoretical binaries of genre<auteur, comedy<drama, low culture<high culture, forms the basis of this chapter.⁷⁸

Chapters three to six engage with constructions of the Black Other in the film(s) in question, in relation to the five tropes that I recognise as typical for the *commedia all'italiana*, and with the theoretical themes described above.

Chapter three discusses *Lo sceicco bianco* (1952) by Federico Fellini. This film, together with Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), which I discuss in chapter seven, has a particular function in the corpus of this study, since they mark the earliest, and the most recent film. Chapter three, therefore, sets off the perspective on possible overlaps, similarities, and developments, or changes in filmic representations of *italianità*, (Black) Otherness, Orientalism, and imperialism, over the course of two decades. Federico Fellini occupies an iconic and mythical place in (Italian) film history, and even though I position his films amongst the *commedia all'italiana*, an analysis of two of his works is particularly interesting given his world famous brand. Therefore, this chapter finds itself in the tension between considering Fellini a *commedia all'italiana* director, and the international allure and *auteur* status Fellini occupies in popular culture and in critical studies. The analysis of *Lo sceicco bianco* brings to the fore the notion of the cartoonish, presented in the film in the shape of *fotoromanzi*, which perpetuates Orientalist fantasies and myths surrounding the purity of Catholic Italian subjects, seen in a recent post World War II context.

⁷⁸ With the notation of <> I refer to supposed hierarchies; the angle of this sign refers to what is inferior to what is placed at the other side of the sign. So, for instance, when I write genre<auteur, I refer to the assumption that auteur films are superior to genre films.

In chapter four, I offer an analysis of *Il moralista* (Giorgio Bianchi, 1959). This film, the theme of which is *fare bella figura*, deals with the strong moral codes the Catholic Church provides for Italian citizens, and with the ‘dark side’ of this system; whereas the analysis of *Lo sceicco bianco* brings to the fore the sanctification of white *italianità*, in *Il moralista*, hidden aspects are revealed, referring to unconscious elements of a national Italian/personal history (of the *italiano medio*).

Chapter five focuses on the *film a episodi*, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (Luciano Salce, Eduardo De Filippo, Marco Ferreri, 1965). The three episodes all deal with constructions of the insider/outsider binary, Orientalising fantasies, and anxieties surrounding the colonial past. The most detailed analysis offered is of the last episode, *La moglie bionda*, in which physical shifts mirror spectacle shifts: the *italiano medio* protagonist in Africa, becomes the lost outsider.

In chapter six, I offer an in-depth analysis of *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1968). While certainties surrounding a construction of *italianità* persist in the minds of the two protagonists, they are ridiculed on a meta level from the very beginning of the film. It ends with a realization even by the protagonists that their securities are based on myths.

To connect a violent, and in some cases, displaced or ignored, chapter of Italian history, and recent developments that seem to echo certain narratives stemming from that chapter of the peninsula, a focus on the period between the end of World War II and the start of the 1980s can offer us a better understanding of these complexities. In chapter seven, I discuss in the shape of a *coda* *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1973), which serves as a guideline in order to consider the

itinerary of the character of the Black Other, and its implications and effects on the character identifiable as the *italiano medio* in the *commedie all'italiana* discussed in this thesis. I thus continue the inductive approach as described by Wagstaff. Since this film is the most recent film of this corpus, while it is set in the 1930s, it offers both an overview of possible developments in the portrayal of what I describe as the Black Other, and a historical-artistic perspective on the Fascist past in Italy, and its echoes in the present.

‘Politically, socially and intellectually, the anti-colonial fight against inequality, racism, cultural hierarchy, has been fought within Europe in the postcolonial era by the subaltern subjects of the developing world who had migrated there’, observes Robert Young.⁷⁹ These subaltern subjects offer in the four films discussed in this study, increasingly explicitly a subversive resignification of notions of *italianità*, through silence, laughter, gazes, language, and music, made possible through the unimedial character of film, through their performances in the *commedie all'italiana* that I analyse in the following chapters.

⁷⁹ Robert J.C. Young, ‘The Postcolonial Condition’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 607.

1. *La conosceva bene lui*: Italian colonial history and its myths in historiography and cinema

In this chapter, I discuss the historical context of the four films that form the corpus of this research, specifically concentrating on Blackness in relation to Italian colonialism, Italian fascism, and their filmic representations. I pay particular attention to the double silence surrounding predominantly one particular Black character in Antonio Pietrangeli's *Io la conoscevo bene* (1965): in the critical silence on this character, I recognise a connection to the anxiety surrounding the Italian imperial enterprises; in the character's significant and active 'silence' I identify a subversive resignification by pointing out, and acting out, the problematic aspects of his representation. This film here functions as the discursive 'cornerstone', providing the content which enables me to explore historical and representational contexts. The analysis of this film serves as a format for the analyses offered in the following chapters. Connecting the findings with contemporary Italy, I acknowledge the necessity of a reconsideration of these themes in Italian (film) history.

In one of the last scenes (1.38.16) of the film *Io la conoscevo bene* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965) the protagonist Adriana (Stefania Sandrelli) finds herself at a dance venue. Having moved to the big city of Rome from the Tuscan countryside, she remains disillusioned. Failing to 'break through' as an actress, she has changed many jobs and romantic partners, finding relief exclusively in music and dancing. A writer she had an affair with, described her in one of his texts as follows (1.01.19).

Vive minuto per minuto. Prendere il sole, sentire i dischi e ballare sono le sue uniche attività. Per il resto è volubile, incostante, ha sempre bisogno di incontri nuovi e brevi, non importa con chi. Con se stessa mai.

By now, we have gotten to know some of her former lovers, all Italians (images 1-3). In the very beginning of the film (00.04.26), for instance, there was the flashback of a date with a young man who aggressively grabbed her on top of the stairs in front of the door of her apartment, making Adriana drop a bottle of red wine, which broke, and splashed all over the floor and walls. (This scene will turn out to be an ominous allusion to the film's ending.) Adriana let the boss of her nail salon make love to her (00.05.48), despite making clear that he was not interested in anything other than her body. For a while, she went to parties with a young man named Dario (00.07.50), but he disappeared without saying goodbye, made her pay for their night at a hotel, and turned out to be a thief. With all of these (and other) men, Adriana had relationships based on rather superficial dialogues in Italian, predominantly (or exclusively?) on physical attractions, and on a 'menefreghismo' attitude from Adriana's side.

Here, at a party, Adriana recognises Dario in the crowd. He vaguely greets her, as he is on a date with another woman. Adriana laughingly tells him he is a thief and a cheater while they dance together one last time on slow-beat music. He tries to defend his persona in vain; she called him out for what he is. She seems to be calmer, in control of the situation, for the first time in the film. The camera zooms in on them, as we see their shoulders and faces, and then it pans over the fountains behind the dancing couple, creating a rather serene atmosphere.

All of a sudden (1.40.26), coinciding with the camera focussing on the roughest, most waterfall-like part of the fountain, the music becomes much louder

and faster, and we see Adriana dancing on a modern jazz beat with a man with a darker skin tone than the men she has been with thus far (images 5-8).⁸⁰ They laugh out loud together, dance loosely, with their arms spread out, wildly twisting their hips. The camera zooms out, as we see the two from afar being observed by other party attendees sitting behind their tables, watching the spectacle from above (image 4). When the camera zooms back in, the man grabs a bottle of wine out of a cooler, takes a sip of the water inside, and spits it out in the air (images 7-8). What follows is a cluster of shots quickly edited one after the other of the two of them in a car in the neighbourhood of E.U.R. at a fast pace driving down the stairs of the modernist church Basilica dei Santi Pietro e Paolo, going in a circle in a speedboat against the high waves in a small lake, eating at a restaurant, and the two of them the next morning in his car, while they look at and listen to birds, and he whistles back at them.⁸¹ We have not heard Adriana laugh so freely before. The man laughs as well, dances, feeds her, and whistles, but there is no dialogue between the two whatsoever. After these scenes, Adriana drives home, takes off her wig and jumps off her balcony. *Fine*.

Many particulars in *Io la conoscevo bene* invite the viewers to investigate and contextualise the film. Set in the years of the *boom economico*, the theme of suicide reminds us of *La dolce vita*'s apocalyptic 1960s atmosphere⁸² – and, as

⁸⁰ The film score is completely written by Piero Piccioni. The accompanying music, therefore, is carefully composed with particular scenes and atmospheres in mind.

⁸¹ I discuss the significance of the filmic setting of the Roman neighbourhood of E.U.R. in chapter five. Cfr. Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space. Comedy, Italian Style* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.103.

⁸² The title of a recent article about the film in *The New York Times* refers to *La dolce vita*: Glenn Kenny, 'I Knew Her Well,' Stefania Sandrelli Reaches for la Dolce Vita', in *The New York Times*, Feb 5, 2016, C8. *La*

Enrico Giacovelli points out, of Pietrangeli's *Il sole negli occhi* (1953), in which a woman commits suicide as well.⁸³ Hipkins, moreover, argues that, the film 'revisits the impossibility of sexual desire for women outside of the label of 'borderline', since Adriana does not want to go into prostitution, while she does enjoy sex with several men.'⁸⁴ The fact that Adriana is a female protagonist, but one who is nevertheless treated dismissively by her male lovers, raises questions about gender roles. The appeal of the Italian entertainment industry to a young woman who recently moved to Rome illustrates the strong allure of *Hollywood sul Tevere* at the time, and fits the context of the *boom economico*.

But it is first of all Adriana's unidentifiable, speechless, last friend, or lover, and the silence surrounding him, that interest me. Since this particular character has been ignored by most critics, we can assume he is considered marginal. However, his unidentifiability, his sudden appearance out of nowhere, his speechlessness, his distinctive looks and behaviour, and his unexplored but nevertheless pivotal role in the film make his appearance stand out. Due to the unimodal quality of film, the unidentified character communicates with us exactly through his lack of speech acts, his physical appearance, and his

dolce vita's generally mentioned themes include a portrayal of 'the city of Rome as a metaphor for Western culture, viewed from a double perspective – before the advent of Christianity (the dominant mythology, now disintegrating) and in the present.' Peter E. Bondanella, *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (New York, London: Continuum, repr. 2007), p. 232.

⁸³ Enrico Giacovelli, *La commedia all'italiana* (Rome: Gremese editore, 1995), p. 33. Giacovelli recognizes in Pietrangeli's films an exceptional focus on strong women, describing his films as 'una serie di ritratti femminili che non ha uguale nel cinema italiano: *Adua e le compagne*, *La visita*, e *Io la conoscevo bene*' (p. 170).

⁸⁴ Danielle Hipkins, *Italy's Other Women* (2016), p. 327.

physicality.⁸⁵ Indeed, his distinguishable presence draws attention to the Italian reality of the colonial trauma and to the consequent binary, racialising thinking in terms of in- and exclusion. The fact that this character appears out of nowhere corresponds with the lack of acknowledgement of Italy's colonial past, denying this character as possibly Italian: as a non-Italian, he appears to have no (hi)story.

Natalie Fullwood investigates in *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space* how ideas of gender affect what she describes as profilmic and filmic spaces, with which she intends 'three-dimensional (...) spaces in the world' (both locations or studio-based sets), the profilmic spaces, which are then turned into 'two-dimensional, fictional, "filmic" space[s] of the cinematic image.'⁸⁶ She argues that 'a character's gender positions affect the type of spaces in which they appear and move within a cinematic narrative'. Borrowing again from a gender theory based text, I assert that, in the case of *Io la conosco bene* and of the films that I discuss in the next chapters, the positioning of a character in the profilmic and filmic spaces is also often race-related. The racialization of specific characters has to do not merely with the colour of the characters' skin as a contrast to Italian characters, but moreover with their (lack of exhibited) culture or history, their position in the plot of the film, and in the profilmic and filmic spaces. Similar to Laura Mulvey's notion of the gendered gaze, or the 'male gaze', a theory Fullwood bases her analysis on, I here search for manifestations of the 'racialized gaze' – Collin Richards refers to the 'apartheid-gaze', and as Audrey T. McCluskey describes, referring to the depiction of African-Americans in all

⁸⁵ On speech acts, see J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

⁸⁶ Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space. Comedy, Italian Style* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 5-6.

media, I look for 'Imaging Blackness.'⁸⁷

I agree that 'a text's truest meaning lies in what it does not say'; The character Adriana dances with might be wordless, but he is full of meaning.⁸⁸ His Black presence is contrasted to the Italian, lighter skinned men Adriana has been with thus far. The profilmic space in which this character is positioned is suggestive, as the waterfall corresponds with his spitting the water out of his mouth, emphasising the depiction of him as animal-like (images 5-8), and corresponding with 'wild' nature not immediately associated with Italian landscapes. Publicist and politician Leopoldo Franchetti's (1847-1917) 1891 utopian imaginary of the Italian colonization in Eritrea, for instance, included a long and idyllic description of Eritrean ecological prosperity;

The water for people and animals to drink, and for watering greater quantities of vegetables than a rural population needs, is not lacking here, any more than in the hills of Tuscany or Umbria. The area around Asmara, and even more the lands on the plateau that slope down from its brow to the west, are in this respect in better condition than, for

⁸⁷ Laura Mulvey introduced the notion of the male gaze in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' of 1975. Cfr. Laura Mulvey and Rachel Rose, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, 1975 (London: Koenig Books, 2016). Cfr. Colin Richards, 'About Face: Aspects of Art, History and Identity in South African Visual Culture', *Third Text: Third World perspectives on contemporary art & culture*, vol. 16-17 (1991), pp. 101-133. Cfr. Audrey T. McCluskey, *Imaging Blackness: Race and Racial Representation in Film Poster Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

⁸⁸ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, 'Surface Reading: An Introduction', *Representations*, 108/1 (2009), 1-21.

example, the Chianti area, not to mention Puglia.⁸⁹

Remarkable is the equalization of animals with people ‘out there’. As David Forgacs argues, the Italian colonial economic vision in Eritrea,

(...) envisaged an economic transformation of the colony modelled on Italian traditions and practices, but it also drew attention to the failings of the domestic economy and imagined how the colony might become a model of what Italy was not.⁹⁰

The background music in the scenes with the Adriana’s friend in *Io la conoscevo bene* adds chaos to the waterfall-theme. He, moreover, is observed by Italian visitors of the party who embody the racialized gaze from afar, and from above: from their perspective, he dances for them, which refers not only to the show business theme of the film, but also to the trope of the Black performer in the background in films such as *Tutti a casa* (Luigi Comencini, 1960), and *La parmigiana* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1963), or even to the (Italian?) trope of the minstrel and blackface as discussed above. His positioning from afar and from above moreover distances him from the viewer of the film, and from Adriana’s former lovers, all of whom are known to the viewer through close-ups, a more frog-eye perspective (images 1-4), their voices, and the way they spoke.

Similar to spatial emptiness, silence (emptiness of sound) can open up ‘the possibility of an unnamed event in the past’ or ‘a nonevent, a continuity with a

⁸⁹ Leopoldo Franchetti, *L'Italia e la sua colonia africana* (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1891), pp. 40, 42, *cit.* in David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins. Social Exclusion and Nation Formation Since 1861* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 83-4.

⁹⁰ David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins* (2016), p. 84.

past that has always been out of sync with itself'.⁹¹ Michel Foucault argues that,

[t]here is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say [...]. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.⁹²

Indeed, film scholars have pointed to 'speechless' roles in films as key characters for the plot of the film in question. Karen Pinkus, for instance, identifies in Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'eclisse* a collective amnesia of the colonial past in Monica Vitti's character's blackface, and in Black characters who simply appear in specific moments in the film, without getting the chance to talk, not dissimilar to the character in *Io la conoscevo bene*. Here, Gayatri Spivak's famous question of whether the subaltern can speak comes to mind; in the case of *L'eclisse*, as Pinkus argues, s/he cannot.⁹³

While his skin tone is possibly the first direct indicator of difference and could indicate a 'passing cliché',⁹⁴ the unidentified character in *Io la conoscevo bene* is more than a character in the background, painted, as it were, onto the

⁹¹ Instead of silence, Karen Pinkus refers to the emptiness of the location of the opening scene in Antonioni's *L'eclisse*: Karen Pinkus, 'Empty Spaces. Decolonization in Italy', in *A Place in the Sun*, ed by Patrizio Palumbo (2003), pp. 299-320 (p. 299).

⁹² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1, An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 27. Foucault also states that '[s]ilence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies.'

⁹³ Gayatri Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Carly Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (ed.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

⁹⁴ Danielle Hipkins, *Italy's Other Women* (2016), p. 1.

frame, or in the case of Monica Vitti's character, onto a white face.⁹⁵ He is very present in the scenes, and interacts directly with Adriana. The speech-less character in *Io la conoscevo bene* is not voiceless, since we repeatedly hear his loud laughter, but he is portrayed as a much more physical presence than other characters. When he laughs, he fully opens his mouth, shaking with his entire body, and making wild hand gestures. When he dances, he moves freely and actively. He seems able to communicate with the birds through his whistling. In addition to the fast-beat music, the character is constantly accompanied by loud synchronous sounds, such as the sound of the car bumping down the stairs, and the sound of the motor boat.⁹⁶ Through contextual audio, his physicality, and his physical appearance, he thus actively communicates a certain kind of difference, since the Italian men Adriana has been with thus far were positioned in different profilmic and filmic settings. This is further emphasized by the suddenly changing editing style and music.

But his verbal silence makes me wonder about what he does not say through words; does he hold back something he is not supposed to say? *Io la conoscevo bene* also raises questions about linguistic or physiological difference: the character might not be able to speak (standard Italian).⁹⁷ Furthermore, the film

⁹⁵ My choice of the word 'painted' here refers to Antonioni's great admirer of fine arts, and to the fact that he himself was also a painter. <http://www.adnkronos.com/cultura/2015/10/29/michelangelo-antonioni-pittore-energia-colore-alla-galleria-roma-foto_DU8CTDVE1EQCQt8Vpx9P9K.html> [accessed 19 March 2017].

⁹⁶ As Chion observes, 'synchronous sounds are most often forgotten as such, being "swallowed up" by the fiction.' Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 3.

⁹⁷ On the usage of dialect in *Amarcord* see chapter seven, cfr. Cosetta Gaudenzi, 'Memory, Dialect, Politics: Linguistic Strategies in Fellini's *Amarcord*', in *Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Burke and Marguerite R. Waller (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002), pp. 155-168. See also Tijana

acknowledges different forms of communication: if they do not communicate through spoken words, what language do Adriana and her friend use, since Adriana seems to sincerely enjoy his company?

Even though they are no protagonists, other male characters in the film have Adriana function as a marginal character serving their life stories, explicitly telling her they are interested predominantly in her body. This enables them to recognize in Adriana an embodiment of their own projections. In the film plot, the non-speaking man in question, on the other hand, is reduced to a symbol of change in Adriana's life, therefore becoming a passive subject/body of which we know very little, merely serving Adriana's plotline. Taking into account the chaos that dominates his scenes, his uninhibited behaviour, the loud synchronous sounds, and his unidentifiability, the depiction of this Black, silenced, and nameless character becomes problematic, as it reflects the observations by scholars such as bell hooks, Franz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak of the subordinate position of the Black wo/man and the subaltern in Western (cultural) history.⁹⁸

As bell hooks argues,

[r]epresentations that socialize black males to see themselves as always lacking, as always subordinated to more powerful white males whose approval they need to survive, matter in white patriarchy. Since competition between males is sanctioned within male dominated society, from the standpoint of white patriarchy, black masculinity must be kept

Mamula and Lisa Patti (ed.), *The multilingual screen: new reflections on cinema and linguistic difference* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

⁹⁸ Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Carly Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988).

“in check.” Black males must be made subordinate in as many cultural arenas as possible.⁹⁹

The character in *Io la conoscevo bene*, just as the Black males discussed by hooks, is de-humanised through his anonymity and his free and chaotic presence that does not fit in with the Italian social codes of the time – it does not fit in with the notion of *fare bella figura*. He is differentiated from Adriana’s white male lovers, and according to the plot subordinate to her, a white female, as well. However, since the film has a grotesque and threatening undertone, we are invited to reflect on this problematic depiction.

As further argued by Hipkins, in the immediate post- World War II period, in Italian cinema took place

a radical change of tone and anxious emphasis on whiteness, vulnerability and ambiguous sexuality that Sarah Projansky identifies in the emergence of the Hollywood girl star, for whom “anxiety and tensions surrounding gender, race, and sexuality are part of the complex and fraught (both adored and abhorrent) version of girlhood she represents”.¹⁰⁰

These stars, she argues, are identifiable by blonde hair, have ‘gentle figures’ or come across as weak, as opposed to a ‘shapely, sexually knowledgeable, dark-haired older woman’. Adriana’s character indeed is approached by an older, dark-haired woman to become a prostitute, to which she refuses. Though promiscuous,

⁹⁹ bell hooks, *Reel to Real. Race, Class and Sex at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, repr. 2009), p. 105. In her book, she discusses mostly American films and African American Blackness. However, a similar pattern can be found in European cinema and the description fits the character of *Io la conoscevo bene* like a glove.

¹⁰⁰ Danielle Hipkins, *Italy’s Other Women* (2016), p. 82.

blonde, fragile looking Adriana does serve as a contrast to the dark man she encounters – not dissimilar to what Hipkins describes as the juxtaposition between an African-American GI and a ‘white’ girl in *Vivere in pace* (Luigi Zampa, 1947), referring in turn to Greene’s work as discussed above (and below).

All of this raises questions about the position of the Black wo/man in the Italian society and culture during the making of the film, and about possible reflections of that position in today’s society. Is the character in *Io la conosco bene* a typical example of a ‘colonial hangover’,¹⁰¹ as such echoing the ‘imperial bodies’ of Italian fascist film and the colonial ‘international Orientalist trend in filmmaking’, and what would this tell us about Italy’s contemporary society?¹⁰² How are similar characters depicted in various Italian films of various periods? What is the character’s relation to the national political silence and trauma surrounding the colonial chapter of Italian history, described by Angelo Del Boca as a ‘rimozione’, which has become an increasingly studied topic over the last three decades in academia? And (how) is there a connection between him, the notion of an Italian identity (?), the *questione meridionale* as an ‘internal colonization’,¹⁰³ and the ‘external colonization’ of Somalia, Eritrea, Xianjin (China), the Dodecanese islands (Greece), Libya, Ethiopia (?), and Albania?¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Cfr. Sunny Bergman, *Our Colonial Hangover* (documentary, 55 min, The Netherlands, 2014, colour, DCP). In this documentary, the character of Zwarte Piet, or Black Pete, is presented as an example of a colonial hangover in the Netherlands.

¹⁰² On the notion of ‘imperial bodies’, cfr. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 118-213.

¹⁰³ Shelleen Greene, Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), p. 253. Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, translation and introduction by Pasquale Verdicchio (Toronto: Guernica 2005).

¹⁰⁴ The question mark after Ethiopia refers to the fact that the Italians occupied Ethiopia in 1935, while the occupation was condemned by the League of Nations ‘for assaulting an independent, sovereign nation (and a

These questions form the foundation of this research. Below, I argue that a focus on the medium of film lends itself to particular insightful answers concerning the imaginary of *italianità* and its Black Others.

The 1980s are considered a pivotal moment in Italian history, since for the first time Italy knew more immigrants than emigrants, changing Italy from a ‘country of departure’ into a ‘destination country’.¹⁰⁵ Derek Duncan observes that

[t]he presence of migrants in Italy since the 1980s has been commonly seen as a key factor in prompting some kind of revival of interest in the nation’s own colonial past, an aspect of the country’s history that had largely been placed under erasure,¹⁰⁶

identifying a strong link between the presence of migrant bodies in Italy and a recognition of the memory of a violent colonial past in which these people were wounded. He also recognises in the return of the stele to Axum in the late 1990s a determining moment, commenting that afterwards ‘the recollection of the colonial past has featured more insistently in a range of cultural forms suggesting that Italy is perhaps now ready to begin reflecting on that past.’¹⁰⁷ Cristina Lombardi-Diop agrees that ‘since the end of the 1980s’ there is a sense of a ‘scholarly

member of the League of Nations’) and imposed economic sanctions against Italy. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. xiv. The difference between occupation and colonization are not always clear in literature, and Ethiopia did form part of the Italian Empire: Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia were united as one colony, *Africa Orientale Italiana* (AOI).

¹⁰⁵ Norma Bouchard, ‘Reading the Discourse of Multicultural Italy: Promises and Challenges of Transnational Italy in an Era of Global Migration’, in *Italian Culture*, vol. XXVIII, no. 2 (2010), pp. 104-20.

¹⁰⁶ Derek Duncan, ‘Shooting the Colonial Past’ (2012), p. 115.

¹⁰⁷ Derek Duncan, ‘Shooting the Colonial Past’ (2012), p. 115. On the Axum obelisk, see Angelo Del Boca, ‘The Myths, Suppressions, Denials, and Defaults of Italian Colonialism’, in *A Place in the Sun*, ed by Patrizio Palumbo (2003), pp.17-36.

reevaluation of the racial dimension of colonialism and its racist practices'.¹⁰⁸

Liliana Ellena, referring to Pinkus' 'nonevent', and Angelo Del Boca's

'rimozione', goes further by arguing that

[i]l periodo che va dal 1945 al 1989, [rappresenta], con poche eccezioni, il terreno di un vuoto storiografico a cui ha contribuito in varie forme il paradigma della 'rimozione' del passato coloniale.¹⁰⁹

Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller state (in 2005) that it was not until recently that Italian colonialism was accounted for in Italian national history, let alone in transnational comparative research.¹¹⁰ Sandra Ponzanesi concludes, therefore, that 'Italian postcolonialism [as a discipline] is (...) somewhat belated compared with other European postcolonialisms', while Teresa Fiore describes Italy's reality for the same reasons as an 'atypical postcoloniality'.¹¹¹

A variation of the abovementioned observations, Grace Russo Bullaro notes that

before the tide of immigration [in the 1980s] the principal target of "racism" in Italian society and its arts was the *terrone*, symbol of Southern ideological, political and economic backwardness, the social parasite that drained the national economy and kept Italy from advancing

¹⁰⁸ Cristina Lombardi-Diop, 'Postracial/Postcolonial Italy' in Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (ed.), *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 175-90 (pp. 175-76).

¹⁰⁹ Liliana Ellena, 'Geografie della razza' (2015), pp. 17-31 (p. 17).

¹¹⁰ Ruth Ben Ghiat and Mia Fuller, *Italian Colonialism* (2005), p. 1.

¹¹¹ Sandra Ponzanesi, 'The Postcolonial Term in Italian Studies. European Perspectives', in Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, pp. 51-69 (p. 51), Teresa Fiore, 'The Emigrant Post-"Colonia" in Contemporary Immigrant Italy', in Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, pp. 71-99 (p. 73).

on an international scale, establishing a connection between colonialism, racism, and *la questione meridionale* as described by Antonio Gramsci.¹¹² The Southern Question is often referred to as a form of ‘internal colonization’.¹¹³ Not shy of racist proclivities himself,¹¹⁴ Gramsci’s texts, as argued by Edward Said and others, are at the basis of the discipline of postcolonial theory.¹¹⁵ This increases the level of complexity surrounding notions of ‘Italian identity’, revealing several layers of racializations and specific variations of difference. In my analyses of the films, I intend to keep these nuances in mind: we can expect a certain type of anxiety surrounding the ‘uncertain’ depiction of a (racial) *italianità*.

There is no consensus over a definitive starting date of an Italian branch of postcolonial theory. Some studies point out examples of a much earlier postcolonial conscience, adding to the contested debate surrounding the question of amnesia. Angelo Del Boca, author of *Italiani, brava gente?*, acknowledges that ‘[c]erto, non mancavano, anche da noi, intellettuali progressisti che auspicavano

¹¹² Grace Russo Bullaro (ed.), *From terrone to extracomunitario. New Manifestations of Racism in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (Leicester: Troubador Publishing, 2010), p. xv.

¹¹³ Sheleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), p. 253.

¹¹⁴ Pasquale Verdicchio, ‘Introduction’, in Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, transl. Pasquale Verdicchio (Toronto: Guernica, 1995), pp. 7-26 (pp. 9-10).

¹¹⁵ Edward Said observes that *La questione meridionale*, “goes beyond its tactical relevance to Italian politics in 1926. [It is] a prelude to *The Prison Notebooks* in which [Gramsci] gave, as his towering counterpart Lukacs did not, paramount focus to the territorial, spatial, geographical foundations of social life.’ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 48-49. See, also, Teresa Fiore, ‘The Emigrant Post-“Colonia” in Contemporary Immigrant Italy’, in Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Lombardi-Diop, pp. 71-99 (p. 73).

cambiamenti radicali nella penisola.’¹¹⁶ Pier Paolo Pasolini is often regarded as a postcolonial theorist, as he discussed *la questione meridionale*, his own rural upbringing in the north of Italy, and the connection to his notion of ‘Africa’ as the global south in many of his literary and cinematic works, long before the 1990s.¹¹⁷ Giovanna Trento concludes in her study on Pasolini’s productions in relation to his perception of ‘Africa’, that

Pasolini concepisce la propria vita, il proprio lavoro e l’osservazione dell’“altro”, come elementi dinamici che costantemente sfumano, rimescolano o contraddicono le categorie acquisite, traendo la propria forza da una tensione ossimorica. (...) [Egli] vive e manifesta anzitempo l’inadeguatezza della dicotomia “osservatore/osservato”.¹¹⁸

In her study on the figure of the *metticcio* in the Italian cinematographic context, Greene also devotes a chapter to Pasolini’s cinematographic and literary productions and his complex relationship to his imaginary of the ‘Global South’, relating it to the depiction of ‘imagined global south’ in a friendship between the Neapolitan tailor Pasquale and his Chinese student Xian in *Gomorrah* (Matteo Garrone, 2008).¹¹⁹

Greene also recognizes in Giorgio Moser’s *Violenza segreta* (1963) ‘one

¹¹⁶ Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005), ebook version.

¹¹⁷ Cfr. G. Trento, *Pasolini e l’Africa. L’Africa di Pasolini. Panmeridionalismo e rappresentazioni dell’Africa postcoloniale* (Milan, Udine: Mimesis Edizioni, 2010); L. Di Blasi, M. Gragnolati, C. F.E. Holzhey (ed.), *The Scandal of Self-Contradiction. Pasolini’s Multistable Subjectivities, Traditions, Geographies* (Vienna, Berlin: Turia + Kant, 2012); Linde Luijnenburg, ‘The Other in Italian Postcolonial Cinema: Pasolini and Fellini. Two Case Studies’, *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani*, Vol. 28 (2013), Fascicolo 1, pp. 34-43; particularly pp. 35-38.

¹¹⁸ Giovanna Trento, *Pasolini e l’Africa* (2010), p. 246.

¹¹⁹ Sheleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), pp. 210-52.

of the earliest expressions of an Italian postcolonial consciousness in film', since it is set in Somalia and therefore displays a direct link to Italy's violent colonial past. *Il mulatto* (Francesco De Robertis, 1949), *La donna scimmia* (Marco Ferreri, 1964), and the much more recent *L'assedio* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1998) are other films she discusses in depth, discussing the various kinds of 'difference' (relating to colonialism, racism, and/or the *questione meridionale*).¹²⁰ Moreover, when discussing 'Buffalo soldiers' in Italian Neorealist films, such as *Paisà* (1946), *Vivere in pace* (1947), and *Tombolo, paradiso nero* (1948), she points out the recurring character of the African-American soldier in these films. She observes that this character

diventa una presenza significativa, che evoca diversi aspetti della storia italiana, dall'Africa romana alla tratta transatlantica degli schiavi, al colonialismo moderno nell'Africa settentrionale ed orientale.

Below, I follow her in recognizing in problematic filmic depictions of Black characters indirect references to Italy's colonial past and its consequences. Like Greene, I argue that the concept of the 'feticismo della razza' offers a different light on these films, 'poiché il suo colore si fa, a livello visuale, significante dell'ansia legata alla differenza razziale.'¹²¹

Most importantly, Greene also devotes a chapter to the *commedia all'italiana*, which in her eyes represent 'hierarchies of whiteness', focusing on two case studies: *Mafioso* (Alberto Lattuada, 1962), and *Pane e cioccolata* (Franco

¹²⁰ Sheleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), p. 10.

¹²¹ Sheleen Greene, 'Buffalo Soldiers on Film. Il soldato afroamericano nel cinema neorealista e postbellico italiano', in Leonardo De Franceschi, *L'Africa in Italia. Per una contro storia postcoloniale del cinema italiano* (Rome: Aracne, 2013), pp. 93-108 (p. 93).

Busati, 1974). Below, I add to the corpus of *commedie all'italiana* in which these 'hierarchies of whiteness' are indeed often present.

Other scholars who share this questioning of the historicist thinking of the 1980s as a turning point in Italian (film) history, include Lilliana Ellena, who recognises in the first decade after World War II a crucial period in Italian film for a construction of

un nuovo vocabolario della differenza razziale che mentre articola la critica del razzismo nei termini di alleanze e solidarietà transnazionali, contemporaneamente contribuisce a fissare i confini culturali di un corpo nazionale definito attorno alla sua bianchezza.¹²²

Gabriele Proglia describes various films and documentaries of the direct Post-World War II era in which he recognizes references to Italy's colonial past, both explicitly (for example, *Vento d'Africa* by Anton Giulio Majano, 1949, *Tripoli bel suol d'amore* by Ferruccio Cerio, 1954, and *Il fiume verde* by Adriano Zancorella, 1955), and implicitly; he notices that 'alcune immagini elaborate in colonia [sono] poi ricontestualizzate nel panorama socio-politico del dopoguerra', mentioning Greene's research on buffalo soldiers in film as an illustration.¹²³ In two films (*Senza pietà* by Alberto Lattuada, 1948, and *Il peccato di Anna* by Camillo

¹²² Lilliana Ellena, 'Geografie della razza' (2015), pp. 17-31 (p. 17). However, she still recognizes in *Il mulatto* and *Eva nera* exceptional films that define the post-war Italian relationship to racial difference. Below, I argue instead that there is a general and yet ever-changing pattern that defines, renegotiates and redefines Blackness, Otherness, Italianness and whiteness in Italian film throughout the 1950s, 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

¹²³ Gabriele Proglia, 'Memorie di celluloidi in controluce. Politiche del ricordo, rimozioni e immaginari del colonialismo (1945-1962)', in Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes, *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli Italiani* (Milan, Udine: Mimesis Edizioni, 2014), pp. 317-329.

Mastrocinque, 1952) he recognizes problematic portrayals of specific Black characters, blocking the way for ‘ogni tipo di rapporto con il colore nero’. He mentions Federico Fellini’s films, for instance, which demonstrate that ‘Black subjects’ are considered ‘fuori luogo’, in other words, a contrast to everything else. Black women, he notices, are sexualised and fetishised. Though I challenge some of these assertions below, I do agree with his recognition of significant echoes of the colonial discourse in these films, such as *Tototarzan* (Mario Mattoli, 1950), through a portrayal of *italianità* which is shaped by having been in contact with ‘Africa’.¹²⁴ In Fellini’s films, however, I recognise a critique on a depiction of this Black Other as ‘fuori luogo’, contrasted to everything else. Below, I illustrate this with two examples: *Lo sceicco bianco* (1952), and *Amarcord* (1973).

Leonardo De Franceschi, noting as well that ‘[n]ot so often (...) the experience of living actors, actresses or directors [of African descent] has been put in connection with that of other filmmakers working in Italian film industry in the 1950s or 1960s’,¹²⁵ has set up the project *Cinemafrodiscendente*, which challenges this lack of acknowledgement. It is created to ‘open a gateway to the experience of filmmakers of African birth or descent, practitioners in any way involved in Italian film industry and culture, from the silent era up to the present day’.¹²⁶ The project consists of the publication of a volume which includes academic articles on this issue and interviews with filmmakers (actors, directors,

¹²⁴ Cfr. Linde Luijnenburg, ‘La piccola Roma. The Female Characteristics of Unoccupied Spaces in Totò Films’, in Peter Volgger and Stefan Graf, *City and Migration. Unfolding Asmara’s Architecture* (Berlin: DOM, 2017), pp. 316-325.

¹²⁵ <<http://www.cinemafrodiscendente.com/it/filmmakers-database/how2/>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

¹²⁶ <<http://www.cinemafrodiscendente.com/it/our-project/>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

etc.), and a website that functions as a database for filmmakers of African descent in Italian cinema.¹²⁷ This project adds complexity to the debate surrounding the question whether the Italian 1950s and 1960s films were practically void of actors and other filmmakers of non-European descent.

The explanation given by some scholars to why the ‘rimozione del passato coloniale’ would have lasted for such a long time, is the narrative of the myth of the *italiani brava gente*. This myth, as Angelo Del Boca argues, ‘ha coperto tante infamie, e anche queste che esporremo, appare in realtà, all’esame dei fatti, un artificio fragile, ipocrita’,¹²⁸ referring to some of the main themes of several films that form the corpus of this research, particularly *Il moralista* (discussed in chapter four). ‘La verità’ he states, ‘è che gli italiani, in talune circostanze, si sono comportati nella maniera più brutale, esattamente come altri popoli in analoghe situazioni’. It is due to Del Boca’s pioneering work and that of his colleagues such as Giorgio Rochat and Nicola Labanca that discussions about Italy’s colonial past (and present) arose in academic circles,¹²⁹ and many studies on Italian colonialism have followed. Mia Fuller and Ruth Ben-Ghiat sum up that Italian colonisers were not such *brava gente*;

they were indeed the world’s first military use of airpower and aerial

¹²⁷ The first aim of the database, according to De Franceschi, is ‘to open, for the very first time on the web, a space where the lives of hundreds of filmmakers of African descent working in Italian cinema may virtually meet.’ <<http://www.cinemaafrodiscendente.com/it/filmmakers-database/how2/>> (accessed 17 November 2016).

¹²⁸ Angelo Del Boca, ‘Premessa’, in *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2005), ebook.

¹²⁹ For a close to exhaustive bibliography on Italian (post-) colonialism, see Maria Grazia Negro, *Il mondo, il grido, la parola. La questione linguistica nella letteratura postcoloniale italiana* (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 2015), p. 13, note 7.

bombardments (during the 1911-1912 Italo-Turkish war); the first country to widely use gases in violation of the 1925 Gas Protocol (in Libya and Eritrea in the 1920s, in Ethiopia in the late 1930s); the first European country to wage a largescale war after World War I (the Ethiopian invasion); and the first Western European country in the twentieth century to employ genocidal tactics outside of the context of world war (in the late 1920s and early 1930s, in the Cyrenaica region of Libya, through a combination of mass population transfers, forced marches, and mass detention in concentration camps).¹³⁰

I would argue that the assumption that the *italiani brava gente* myth prevented Italian citizens from discussing Italy's colonial past before the early 1980s fits in the 'myth of backward Italy in modern Europe'.¹³¹ This narrative, described by Mohamed Aden as

[t]he Italian, stereotyped and picturesque jovial, accessible, macho, fun-loving, a good (but not too diligent) worker, quite simply human, yet also a notable contributor to the abundant blend of culture and technology the West is so proud of, suddenly discovered within himself the calling of the colonizer',

in some cases continues to exist, in academic texts and beyond.¹³² Sandra Ponzanesi argued in 2010, for instance, that 'Italy is behind in the cultural process

¹³⁰ Mia Fuller and Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Colonialism* (2005), p. 4.

¹³¹ John Agnew, 'The Myth of Backward Italy in Modern Europe', in *Revisioning Italy. National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 23-42.

¹³² Mohamed Aden, Italy: 'Cultural Identity and Spatial Opportunism', in Beverly Allen and Mary Russo, pp. 102-03.

of modernization and in acknowledging unpalatable histories (such as colonialism), contemporary issues (such as xenophobia), and forms of social alterity (such as homosexuality)'.¹³³ Simone Brioni's 2011 documentary *Aulò*, moreover, illustrates the presumed 'ignorance' surrounding Italy's colonial past when interviews on Ostia beach with Italian beachgoers reveal a common lack of knowledge surrounding Italy's former colonies.¹³⁴

I follow John Agnew in contesting the narrative of a 'backward Italy', as it fits in a problematic north-south division in the European context. The authority of Gramsci's writings in the transnational 'movement' that calls itself postcolonial studies, makes me question how 'behind' Italian citizens could have been; these works, written in Italian, were first of all published shortly after the end of the war, and must have been introduced to international readers through an acknowledgement of their quality by readers in Italian.

In the following chapters, focusing on the questions presented above, I intend to add to the discussions surrounding a possible nation-wide repression of a postcolonial awareness before the 1980s by deconstructing four *commedie all'italiana* made between 1952 and 1968/73, centralizing the filmic character I describe below and have illustrated above as the Black Other.¹³⁵ I use the word repression, since the films analysed in the following chapters illustrate that either

¹³³ Sandra Ponzanesi, in *What's Queer About Europe? Productive Encounters and Re-Enchanting Paradigms*, ed. by Sudeep Dasgupta and Mireille Rosello, ebook.

¹³⁴ *Aulò* (Simone Brioni et.al., 2011),

<<http://www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net/filmgallery/show/1314?shareLang=it-IT>>.

¹³⁵ In this context, I prefer to use the term 'deconstruction' over 'post-structuralist reading', since I am looking to point out to the underlying structure in the (filmic) texts, which in turn refer to the structures in the Italian society.

unconsciously or consciously, directors, actors, and screenwriters refer to (echoes of) the Italian colonial past and its accompanying narratives, but that these have not always been recognized as doing so. In these films, and in the appearance of this character, I identify a postcolonial critique that is brought to viewers of the films through a mockery of the white *italiano medio* and his relationship to this Black Other. While applying this deconstructionist approach, I follow Jacqueline Reich's supposition that the films reflect the 'greater inconsistencies inherent in Fascist ideologies itself'.¹³⁶ Taking into account that Reich refers to fascist Italy's cinema, I argue that, instead of a rupture of racialising imagery in Italian film after the political fall of fascism, there is a continuation of a portrayal of this fascist ideology – but from a more critical, mocking, perspective in the *commedia all'italiana* films discussed in the next chapters.

Adriana's anonymous friend in *Io la conoscevo bene* is a representative case of the type I describe as the Black Other: physically and/or behaviourally contrasted to characters that are presented as 'Italian', they are therefore marked as different from the 'Italians'. These 'Italians', even though not explicitly described or auto-defined as white, are nevertheless presented as such through a system of cinematographically framed oppositions. Therefore, the term Blackness, just as the term whiteness, is here used as a heuristic term in order to unravel underlying patterns of binary oppositions that reconfirm prejudices and stereotypes stemming from the colonial period, present in the Italian society at the time of the making of the films, many of which resonating as far as to our current society.

¹³⁶ Jacqueline Reich, 'Mussolini at the Movies', in *Reviewing Fascism. Italian Cinema, 1922-1943*, ed. by Jacqueline Reich and Piero Garofalo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), pp. 3-29 (p. 4).

More precisely, I use the two terms because they are linked to the notion of human ‘races’; Karen Pinkus points out that, for ‘an Italian’ in the 1990s, ‘blackness primarily signal[s] a *national* other’.¹³⁷ Even though biologically non-existent, scholars point to the fact that racism and suppression, the consequences of dividing humanity into different ‘races’, are very much alive.¹³⁸ While ‘Italians’ (a undefinable word) ‘deny their own whiteness, and as such an act of denial constitutes the basis of the national discourse on race’,¹³⁹ Italy’s ex-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi’s description of Obama as ‘young, handsome, and also tanned’ is often used to illustrate instead the presence of racism in the Italian political discourse, as well as in other visual or textual contexts, such as in media and everyday language, in which colour, skin and hair tone and the like are often regarded key elements of identity.¹⁴⁰ This links this topic to our present day.

Lombardi-Diop points out, however, that ‘studies on the construction of modern Italian identity have paid little attention to the impact of racial self-definitions and self-perceptions. Scholars, with few exceptions, have not

¹³⁷ Karen Pinkus, ‘Shades of Black in Advertising and Popular Culture’, Beverly Allen, Mary Russo, pp. 134-155 (p. 134).

¹³⁸ Tzvetan Todorov, ‘Race and Racism’, in *Theories of Race and Racism. A Reader*, ed. by John Solomos and Les Back, trans. by Catherine Porter (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 64-70, cfr. Étienne Balibar and Emmanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London, New York: Verso, 1991).

¹³⁹ Alessandro Portelli, ‘The Problem of the Color Blind: Notes on the Discourse on Race in Italy’, in *Crossroutes - The Meaning of Race for the 21st Century*, ed. by Paola Boi and Sabine Broeck (Hamburg and London: LIT, 2003) pp. 29-39 (p. 29).

¹⁴⁰ Cristina Lombardi-Diop, ‘Postracial/Postcolonial Italy’ in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 175-90 (p. 175).

interrogated the racial assumptions that have structured and supported the idea of Italianness as racially coded'.¹⁴¹ Her observations are partly explained by the narrative of there being no 'external others' (Black subjects) in the Italian context between 1945 and the early 1980s, which has invited scholars to focus mostly on either the imperial period, or on contemporary art and literature.

Michel Foucault indicated in a course he taught in the 1970s that racism can assume in its origins the shape of a mythology, 'which, postulating a war between "races," (i.e., incompatible populations) justifies the power of one social group over others.'¹⁴² Indeed, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin argue that '[w]ithout the underlying desire for hierarchical categorization implicit in racism, 'race' would not exist.' They point to the late seventeenth century, a period in which, through Francois Bernier's categorisation of human physical appearance, they recognize the foundation of modern racist thought. They propose the following definition of racism:

[A] way of thinking that considers a group's unchangeable physical characteristics to be linked in a direct, causal way to psychological or intellectual characteristics, and which on this basis distinguishes between 'superior' and 'inferior' racial groups.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Cristina Lombardi-Diop, 'Postracial/Postcolonial (2012), p. 176.

¹⁴² Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976* (London: Penguin, 2003), *cit* in Alessandro Dal Lago, 'Italy's Unmentionable Racism. Reflections on the Image of Foreigners in Italian Culture', in *New Perspective in Italian Studies, Vol. 1: Definitions, Theory, and Accented Practices*, ed. by Graziella Parati (Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), pp. 154-166, (p. 157).

¹⁴³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies. The Key Concepts. Second Edition* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 181.

Apart from everything mentioned above, the Black character in *Io la conoscevo bene* could be considered the final step before Adriana's suicide, suggesting she goes downhill from here. As such, he represents the mythology of an inferior race.

A concrete example of the creation of a mythology surrounding a presumed inferiority of Black subjects in an Italian cinematic context occurs in a scene in Ettore Scola's *Una giornata particolare* (1977). Homemaker and mother of six children Antonietta (Sophia Loren) finds one of her children's comic books on the floor of her kitchen table, entitled *Nel regno dei pigmei*. The camera (and Antonietta's gaze, since the camera follows her) is focused on one particular image in which an Italian soldier is depicted while having his first encounter with local inhabitants of an unspecified African country. 'Ma guarda un po' se delle bestie così piccole debbono fare delle bestialità così grandi!' he points out. He, much taller and stronger than the locals, has to fight them off, as though they were animals – similar to the manner in which *Io la conoscevo bene*'s character dances and behaves more freely and loosely. This comic book is used for a fictional film, but it is an actual historical comic book that existed during the Fascist period.¹⁴⁴ Through this piece of propaganda, the imaginary of inferior Blackness is transmitted to the experience of children reading these comic books.¹⁴⁵ Essays by Gianluca Gabrielli, Luciana Caminiti, and Erica Moretti illustrate how the colonial narrative has influenced educational structures, in order to teach Italian children during the imperial period (and after) that the world was 'composto di

¹⁴⁴ Tullio Kezich and Alessandra Levantesi (ed.), *Una giornata particolare. Incontrarsi e dirsi addio nella Roma del '38* (Turin: Edizioni Lindau, 2003).

¹⁴⁵ Linde Luijnenburg, 'Ettore Scola in Between: Genre, Gender, Colonial, and Cultural Critique', in *Il cinema di Ettore Scola*, ed. by Edward Bowen and Rémi Fournier Lanzoni (Wayne State University Press, forthcoming).

razze gerarchicamente organizzate e a pensare di appartenere ad una popolazione forte, eroica, superiore.¹⁴⁶

I thus follow Ashcroft and his colleagues' definition, with the – possibly superfluous – addition that the group's 'unchangeable physical characteristics' are indeed considered as such, whereas in reality, as becomes clear from the analysis of the four films below, these physical characteristics (in this case described as Black Otherness) change in continuation.

This kind of mythology was possibly perpetuated, or at least, conserved and stimulated, by Fascism, but it was not exclusive to it.¹⁴⁷ David Forgacs, for instance, describes how in Eritrea, during Italy's first colonial war in East Africa, in 1889, locals were considered marginal by the arriving Italian soldiers, which gave way to the latter to treat the former with complete disrespect, bully them, beat them up, and rape them.¹⁴⁸ Ruth Yob, in a study on *madamismo* (a kind of prostitution) in Eritrea, concludes as well that,

[f]rom 1890 to 1922, colonial subjects were made and remade in the image of the colonizer through conversions to Catholicism, the

¹⁴⁶ Gianluca Garbielli, 'Cataloghi visivi della pedagogia dell'alterità. Le tavole delle "razze" nella scuola italiana tra Otto e Novecento', Luciana Caminiti, 'L'impero del "piccolo italiano". Formazione e informazione attraverso le copertine dei quaderni scolastici', Erica Moretti, 'Memorie private di infanzie pubbliche. I bambini libici tra colonia e campi vacanze', in *Quel che resta dell'impero. La cultura coloniale degli italiani*, ed. by Valeria Deplano and Alessandro Pes (Milan, Udine: Mimesis, 2014), pp. 81-106, 107-128, and 129-148 respectively; p. 13.

¹⁴⁷ Riccardo Bonavita, Gianluca Gabrielli, Rosella Ropa (ed.), in *L'offesa della razza. Razzismo e antisemitismo dell'Italia fascista* (Bologna: Patron Editore, 2005), offer an extended visual overview of racism and antisemitism in Italian media during Fascism.

¹⁴⁸ David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins. Social Exclusion and Nation Formation Since 1861* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 69-71.

transformation of free Eritrean women into “comfort wives” and the institutionalization of concubinage as madamismo.¹⁴⁹

Bringing this back to the case of immediate post-World War II Italian cinema, Greene notes that the neorealist films in which African-American characters appear

utilizz[a]no la *blackness* per portare alla luce un discorso razziale italiano, che mette in evidenza la differenza razziale ed etnica nel momento stesso in cui viene compiuto il tentativo di costruire una nazione omogenea.¹⁵⁰

While she refers to the late 1940s and to another filmic approach, I argue that a similar mechanism can be recognized in the *commedie all'italiana* that form part of the corpus of this research.

In these films, I recognise a pattern similar to what Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop consider the heteroreferential racism of several Italian media in the 1960s.¹⁵¹ Pierre-André Taguieff makes a distinction between two kinds of racism: he defines autoreferential racism as a racism of extermination, based on the idea of supremacy of the identity of the self and the necessity to eliminate the other in order to preserve the self, such as the Aryanism of the nazis and the Italian fascism after the *svolta ariana* in 1938. Heteroreferential racism,

¹⁴⁹ Ruth Yob, ‘*Madamismo* and Beyond: The Construction of Eritrean Women’, in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. by Mia Fuller and Ruth Ben-Ghiat (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 233-44 (p. 238).

¹⁵⁰ Sheleen Greene, ‘Buffalo Soldiers on Film’, p. 94.

¹⁵¹ Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop describe it as “‘il razzismo italiano’, ossia l’intreccio tortuoso e complicato, storicamente contestualizzato e originale in sé, di stereotipi, discorsi, teorie e immaginari che ha preso vita in Italia dando corpo a tutta una serie di pratiche e discorsi sia a livello popolare sia a livello istituzionale’, pp. 10-11. In my opinion, we have to be careful with such generalizations which, even though theoretically legitimate, remain deductive. I prefer an inductive approach.

on the other hand, is a racism of exploitation, typical for colonialism. A side-effect of this second type of racism is a lost sense of the identity of the self, creating a system in which the other is defined, while the racial difference of the self is obliterated. In fact,

l'identità razziale degli italiani [...] emerse come il risultato di una contrapposizione che descriveva il Sé per mezzo di un 'contrasto', ossia di un riferimento oppositivo a 'ciò che non è' (degenerata, femminile, africana, nera).¹⁵²

Giuliani and Lombardi-Diop thus observe that the Italian whiteness, seemingly constructed to create a sense of a national identity, is based on an alienation and an objectification – or to use Sara Ahmed's term, a fetish – of a Black Other, linking this to Lacan's notion of Otherness.

As I argue below, even though the white Italian heterosexual man is at the centre of attention in the four *commedie* described in the following chapters, he is fully dependent on the marginalised Black Other in order to establish his own identity of the white self. The more we can find answers to questions surrounding a filmic imaginary of the constructed Black Other, the more we will come to understand the constructed notion of the Italian self. This research reveals therefore more about a constructed *italianità* than about the Others it implies to discover: it is an investigation of imaginaries of a national self through a focus on Otherness. The contrast between the Black unidentified man and Adriana's Italian lovers suggests a tendency to define the identity of the men through a superficial objectification of its others (female Adriana, her Black friend), presenting the self

¹⁵² Gaia Giuliani in Gaia Giuliani, Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero. Storia dell'identità razziale degli italiani* (Milan: Le Monnier, 2013), p. 22.

as exclusive, authentic, and unique.

Alienated from ‘the Italians’, the character of the Black Other reflects Nirmal Puwar’s and Sara Ahmed’s concepts of the ‘body out of place’ and the ‘Strange Body’ respectively, and indeed echoes the ‘imperial bodies’ as described by Ben-Ghiat. With the concept of the Space Invader, or the ‘body out of place’, Puwar refers to ‘different bodies’ that are not the ‘somatic norm’ in a specific site.¹⁵³ Describing the recent development of ‘diversity’ as a policy, which makes space for women and racialised minorities to be included in the hierarchies of organisations, Puwar observes that in this context it becomes overtly obvious that ‘[s]paces have been formed through what has been constructed out’.¹⁵⁴ This reflects what I argue below regarding the *commedia all’italiana*: at the time of a post World War II national identity crisis, identity seems to be cinematically formed through what has been constructed out – fitting in the notion of heteroreferential racism, and Lacan’s notion of the Other which can be found in subjects that fit descriptions of former colonised. However, in the corpus introduced here, when Italian subjects go to former colonised land (as is the case in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* and *Riusciranno?*), they become the bodies out of place – returning back home, they will have to reconsider their binary ideas of belonging and difference. In a sense, and as time passes, we get to experience the films of the corpus of this research through an experience of Black subjectivity, since the films become increasingly constructed through the gaze of the former colonised.

Ahmed recognises a difference between the concept of the stranger and

¹⁵³ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders. Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (New York: Berg, 2004), p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Nirmal Puwar, p. 1.

that of the other: '[The figure of the alien,] so over-represented in popular culture that it has become quite recognisable (...) reminds us that what is 'beyond the limit' is subject to representation: indeed, what is beyond representation is also, at the same time, over-represented.'¹⁵⁵ The last part of this phrase interests me in particular since it begs the question of whether, what kind, and how, a metaphorical alien, the hypothetical Black Other, is portrayed in the films discussed in the following chapters. She describes how the notion of the stranger is projected onto certain kinds of others: '*some bodies* are already recognized as stranger than other bodies'.¹⁵⁶ With the notion of 'stranger fetishism' she points out the mechanism that, while objectifying the stranger, one assumes 'it has a life of its own'. She illustrates how aliens

[...] function to establish and define the boundaries of who 'we' are in their very proximity, in the very intimacy of the relationship between (alien) slime and (human) skin [...] As the outsider inside, the alien takes on a spatial function, establishing relations of proximity and distance within the home(land). Aliens allow the demarcation of spaces of belonging: by coming too close to home, they establish the very necessity of policing the borders of knowable and inhabitable terrains. The techniques for differentiating between citizens and aliens, as well as between humans and aliens, allow the familiar to be established as the familial.¹⁵⁷

For the abovementioned reasons, in this research, the focus point is

¹⁵⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ Sara Ahmed *Strange Encounters* (2000), p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Sara Ahmed *Strange Encounters* (2000), p. 3.

predominantly the physical distinction that is made between the body of the neighbour and that of the stranger, as Ahmed puts it. The physical distinction becomes the point of recognition that passively opens up to a projection of all things that are considered un-[blank] – and opens up the possibility of a recognition of sonic and behavioural difference as well. As argued by Aschheim,

[t]he normal (and ideal) bourgeois is held to be manly, self-controlled, honest, healthy, clean, and handsome; outsiders are abnormal, effeminate, nervous, sickly, wily, dirty, and ugly. Such constructions of normality and abnormality, the fundamental yardsticks of respectability, act essentially as mechanisms of social control, the means by which all can be assigned their designated place: the normal and the abnormal, the healthy and the sick, the rooted and the restless, the native and the foreigner, the productive and the profligate.¹⁵⁸

The mechanisms and oppositions between these couples are very much apparent in the *commedie all'italiana* that are discussed in the following chapters. However, the focus is mostly on how the *italiano medio* projects these notions of abnormality, effeminacy, nervousness, ugliness, etcetera, onto the Black Other, illustrating an anxiety surrounding the idea of not-belonging. The Black body (migrant/outsider/alien) physically distinguishable from the Italian white (?) body in the four films that form the corpus of this research functions as a blank slate¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Steven E. Aschheim, *At the Edges of Liberalism. Junctions of European, German, and Jewish History* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), p. 149.

¹⁵⁹ I use the term of 'blank slate' on purpose, as Richard Dyer points out the arbitrariness of the 'colour' of white as a metaphor for everything that is neutral, whereas in the English language and culture – and in the Dutch, for that matter – blackness has a negative connotation. Richard Dyer, *White* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997).

onto which a fetishism, a projection (the ‘life of its own’) is placed, a consequence of fear, anxiety, and other effects of colonisation, the loss of the war, and a largely undefined position in post-World War II Europe.

Cinema is a particularly valuable medium for this type of analysis because of its visual, imaginary, characteristics. Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller point out that the disciplines of postcolonial studies and film studies are both ‘deeply involved with questions of representation, and they have much to offer each other concerning the forms and legacies of epistemological violence and the role of aesthetics in reshaping the human *sensorium*’.¹⁶⁰ Mussolini recognised a powerful tool in cinema as well: he founded Cinecittà on the historical date of 21 April, 1937, with the slogan ‘il cinema è l’arma più forte’. In the immediate post-World War II period, furthermore, Italy had a particularly strong relationship to cinema, both in terms of its international fame and acclaim (*Hollywood sul Tevere*) and in terms of its national popularity.¹⁶¹ Duncan, in fact, suggests that cinema can be conceptualized as ‘the cultural crucible of Italian national identity’.¹⁶²

Since film deals with the notion of representation, we can go back to *Io la conoscevo bene* and wonder whose subjectivity is represented in the film, and ask ourselves, who knows whom well? First of all, the question of who the first

¹⁶⁰ Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller (eds.), *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Masolino D’Amico mentions the massive amounts of Italian visitors to the cinema in the immediate post-World War II period. Masolino D’Amico, *La commedia all’italiana: il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008).

¹⁶² Derek Duncan, ‘Italy’s Postcolonial Cinema and Its Histories of Representation’, in *Italian Studies*, vol. 63 (2008, 2), 195-211 (196).

person character in *Io la conoscevo bene* is, remains unanswered throughout the film – just as it remains unanswered by scholars and journalists. Does the first person in the title refer, for instance, to the director, screenwriter, and the other filmmakers, meta-narrating the film? There is an implication of an outsider observer, of which we know nothing. Whose subjectivity are we acknowledging? This opens up a space for an unknown, anonymous, Other, through whose gaze not just Adriana and all other characters in the film, but we, as viewers, are controlled, since we are forced to follow their gaze. This alludes to a spectacle shift which will reveal itself throughout the analyses of the films below: Whereas in the earlier films, *italiani medi* can still fool themselves into being in control, it becomes ever clearer that they are indeed performing their *italianità*, for a Black Other, and for us.

The most obvious answer for who *la* is – Adriana, since she is the protagonist – points out the fact that she is fetishised in Ahmed's terms; she is the object of knowing. The hierarchical structure outlined above (Adriana is serving the white heterosexual male plotlines but dominates the scenes with the Black man) suggests that the film is constantly about the Italian, white, heterosexual male, since it 'explicitly represents woman [...] as object of a phallogentric gaze', while Black masculinity is 'kept in check', to refer back to hooks' quote above.¹⁶³

However, to the writer mentioned in the introduction above, who describes Adriana as living 'minute by minute', she replies: 'Sono così? Una specie di deficiente?', to which he replies: 'Ma no, al contrario. Forse sei tu la persona più saggia di tutti.' This illustrates that he, despite trying to describe her, fails to understand (her); he is confused. The comedic approach of the *commedia*

¹⁶³ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), p. 126.

all'italiana contains the particular characteristics of satirising, subverting, and revealing subconscious sentiments: the joke can be seen as a 'lifting of limits' – even if the 'joke' has a happy ending.¹⁶⁴ Since the film frames its subjects and objects through a comedic lens, they are all automatically questioned. The male 'lens' might exactly be criticised, since it is satirised.

Moreover, the only person who really listens to Adriana, with whom she seems at ease, is exactly the Black character without words. He is the one who interacts with her without searching to define her (the writer) or use her for her body (Dario, and many other men). He, unlike her former Italian lovers, does not project onto her his fears of not belonging, already finding himself outside of the hegemonic power. *Lui* la conosceva bene, embodying Lacan's Other. He takes Adriana with him to various places, and she joins him willingly, laughingly. At least for a little while, he defines her plot.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue that,

[b]y translating the fact of colonial oppression into a justifying theory, however spurious, European race thinking initiated a hierarchy of human variation that has been difficult to dislodge. Although race is not specifically an invention of imperialism, it quickly became one of imperialism's most supportive ideas, because the idea of superiority that generated the emergence of race as a concept adapted easily to both impulses of the imperial mission: dominance and enlightenment.

Within this European context of colonialism and racializing thinking, the Italian case is specific for various reasons. 'The first sitting leader to have a

¹⁶⁴ Natalija Bonic, 'Psychoanalysis and Comedy. The (Im)Possibility of Changing the Socio-Symbolic Order', *Journal for the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, 4 (2011), 91-108 (p. 108).

comprehensive racist project', Benito Mussolini, warned in 1927 that decreases in European fertility meant that 'the entire white race, the Western race, could be submerged by races of color that multiply with a rhythm unknown to our own.'¹⁶⁵ In other words, racism was at the core of Mussolini's fascism.¹⁶⁶ Ben-Ghiat observes that the Ascension Day speech offered 'a blueprint for a revolution in reproductive habits that would preserve white European hegemony';

[f]or Mussolini (...) fascist modernity did not merely imply the defeat of degenerative influences within Italy, but also the neutralization of nonwhite races whose continued growth would bring about an era of 'senseless disorder and unfathomable despair'.¹⁶⁷

Compared to most European nation states, Italy was a late party to the Scramble for Africa, because of its relatively late foundation as a modern nation state. Greene argues that 'Italy's claim to nationhood status was in many ways tied to its ability to take part in Western imperialism.'¹⁶⁸ Colonialism and the imperial enterprises are in fact considered the foundations of the Italian state, and

¹⁶⁵ This was in a preface for the Italian translation of Richard Kohrerr's tract *Decline of Births: Deaths of Peoples*. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 19-20.

¹⁶⁶ Cfr. Ayele Bekerie, 'African Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War', in *Revisioning Italy. National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. by Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 116-133. On the term 'racializing', cfr. the introduction to Karim Murji and John Solomos' *Racialization. Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-27; and Ali Rattansi's 'The Uses of Racialization: The Time-spaces and Subject-objects of the Raced Body', pp. 271-301.

¹⁶⁷ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 20.

¹⁶⁸ Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012) p. 4.

therefore the key-components to the modern concept of the ‘Italian identity’ and the metropolitan constructions of ‘race’; compared to other European significant empires such as France or the UK, Italian colonialism was arguably even more central to the ‘construction of nationhood’.¹⁶⁹ The endlessly repeated saying ‘Abbiamo fatto l’Italia, ora dobbiamo fare gli italiani’, attributed (wrongly?) to Massimo D’Azeglio, illustrates the seeming impossibility of bringing together a people as varied as the newly founded country was long.¹⁷⁰ The *questione meridionale* as described by Gramsci is an illustration of how Italy was struggling internally with the metropolitan and transnational notion of the South.

Not far from a century removed from the start Mussolini’s leadership today, as argued above, its mind-set and imaginary continue to exist in popular culture and political thought. In an interview with the actor and director Pif in 2015, while discussing *Una giornata particolare*, arguably Ettore Scola’s most famous film, and set entirely in Rome on the day of Hitler’s visit to the *città eterna*, Scola explained some of his motives for making a film about fascism at that time:

non tutte le forme di fascismo che appaiono [in *Una giornata particolare*] sono finite. [O]ltre al fascismo c’è la mentalità fascista che dura e perdura in molti, e forse in ognuno di noi c’è anche, ogni giorno, un minuto di fascismo.¹⁷¹

Antonio Gramsci notes in his prison books, that

¹⁶⁹ Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, *Italian Colonialism* (2005), pp. 2-3.

¹⁷⁰ Claudio Gigante argues that it was not Massimo D’Azeglio who uttered those words. Claudio Gigante, ‘Fatta l’Italia, facciamo gli Italiani’. Appunti su una massima da restituire a d’Azeglio’, in *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani*, 26.2 (2011), 5–15.

¹⁷¹ Ettore Scola in *Ridendo e scherzando - Ritratto di un regista all’italiana* (Paola and Silvia Scola, 2015).

[t]utto il lavoro di interpretazione del passato italiano e la serie di costruzioni ideologiche e di romanzi storici che ne sono derivati è prevalentemente legato alla pretesa di trovare una unità nazionale.¹⁷²

How were an ‘Italian national identity’ and its O/others established and/or reaffirmed in Italian cinema during the imperial period, at the time Gramsci wrote this observation? The answer to this question enables us to recognise possible echoes of imaginary racialized stereotypes in post-war Italian film.

As Ben-Ghiat argues, ‘[t]he narratives of empire film, like empire itself, revolved around the management of imperial bodies’.¹⁷³ With this concept, she refers to the (imagined) bodies of both the colonizers (in this case, ‘Italians’) and the colonial subjects (its others), which

reinforce, and sometimes transgress, social and racial hierarchies and are marked by the displacement and journeys occasioned by Italian wars and occupations and by the encounters, for all races, with alterity.¹⁷⁴

In her work, Ben-Ghiat analyses the ‘imperial bodies’ in their various forms and shapes in the Italian imperial films, accentuating the visual component of her analysis. Focusing on *Lo squadrone bianco* (1936, Augusto Genina), and *Sentinelle di bronzo* (1937, Romolo Marcellini), in which she pays specific attention to Libyan *meharisti* and Somali *dubat*, and on *L’Esclave blanc* (1936, Carl Theodor Dreyer and Jean-Paul Paulin) and *Sotto la Croce del Sud* (Guido Brignone, 1938), with an emphasis on attractions between white men and black

¹⁷² Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 2004).

¹⁷³ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 118

¹⁷⁴ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 118.

and ‘Levantine’ women on plantation settings in Somalia and Ethiopia, she concludes that ‘[i]n most of these films, flows of white desire for women interfere with military duty and governance of the indigenous’, and that

[i]n all of [the four films], the nomad and the nomadic feature is the Italian empire’s internal enemy, whether in the form of indigenous tribes, wayward female temperaments, or the *mal d’Africa* that afflicts their male protagonists.¹⁷⁵

The films examined in her research, she argues, ‘proclaim Italian dominance and superiority with respect to the occupied populations for conquest, governance, labor, and sexual satisfaction.’¹⁷⁶

The white desire for women fits in with the general degrading/fetishizing gaze towards the colonial subjects, arguably most commonly expressed in the trope of the Black Venus.¹⁷⁷ Ponzanesi, for instance, observes that ‘colonial authority and racial distinctions were implicitly structured in gendered terms’.¹⁷⁸ She goes on to argue that, in the colonial discourse, ‘the black body became an icon for sexuality in general and (...) sexuality became a metaphor for domination’, connecting Ben-Ghiat’s observations of the ‘white desire for women’ and the ‘governance of the indigenous’.

¹⁷⁵ Ben-Ghiat *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, p. 118.

¹⁷⁶ Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁷ I have argued elsewhere, that Totò films lend themselves perfectly for an analysis of notions of otherness. Linde Luijnenburg, ‘La piccola Roma. The ‘Female’ Characteristics of Unoccupied Spaces in Totò Films’, in *City and Migration. Unfolding Asmara’s Architecture*, ed. by Peter Volgger and Stefan Graf (Berlin: DOM, 2017), pp. 316-25.

¹⁷⁸ Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices’, in Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, pp. 165-89 (p. 165).

The degrading attitude towards therefore exploitable or submissive (spaces and) women is dominant in films of this epoch. But of course, the heteronormative assumptions concerning gender that underlie the aforementioned observations are not exhaustively representative. Anne McClintock observes that '[c]olonized peoples were figured as *sexual* deviants, while gender deviants were figured as *racial* deviants', not specifying gender.¹⁷⁹ Inferiorly presented 'imperial bodies' were not exclusively female, but sometimes, for instance, male and homoerotic or homosexual. A historical illustration is a 1912 letter by Italian soldier Aldo Polcri, who describes a love story between him and a local man, referring to him as 'il mio moretto', 'il mio piccolo impiastrino', 'il cioccolatino', with his 'due braccine nere' and 'quel visino bello nero', 'e come un cagnolino che salta sempre alle gambe del padrone e fa e chiede le carezze'.¹⁸⁰ Ben-Ghiat points in the films she analyses to 'male camaraderie, in the show of bodies at battle, or in the nostalgic performances that have long been a staple of emigrant and military life' as openings to 'the excluded realm of the homosexual' (referring to Duncan).¹⁸¹ She therefore takes into consideration the 'performative dimension of masculinity', which I underline as well in the analysis of the films below.

There are several layers of refusal of this performativity of masculinity, which impact the way in which characters are presented and positioned in films. Female inferiority results to be only one – and arguably the most common – inferiority signifier on the spectrum of 'subordinate subjects' in terms of gender

¹⁷⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (1995), p. 182.

¹⁸⁰ *Posti al sole. Diari e memorie di vita e di lavoro dalle colonie d'Africa*, ed. by Nicola Labanca (Rovereto: Edizioni Osiride, 2001), pp. 252-53. I thank Mary Jane Dempsey for mentioning this letter to me.

¹⁸¹ Ben-Ghiat, *Italian Fascism's Empire Cinema*, p. 13.

according to the imperial narrative. This underlines the intersectional characteristic of this hierarchical system.

Bringing this back to the Italian context and to *Io la conoscevo bene*, the plot of the film presents the following hierarchical scheme: white male characters > white female character > Black male character. The question then arises, what about a Black female character? Twice in the film, a Black woman appears. The first time is in a scene halfway through the film (1.06.20). Adriana is on a film set, where she has a (minor) role. She walks past a Black woman without noticing her. This contradicts the assumption of an Italy with no Black subjects before the 1980s, but since Adriana ignores her, she can go unnoticed. This echoes an ignorance of a colonial past in which inequalities were created.

A later scene in *Io la conoscevo bene*, is set at a party for networking Italian filmmakers, producers and actors. Paganelli (Franco Fabrizi), a film producer and the organizer of the party, is irritated when he recognizes Cianfanna (Nino Manfredi) in the crowd as he had forbidden the latter to attend. He walks over to Cianfanna to confront him, to which Cianfanna replies that he has brought someone for Paganelli, pointing out to the Black woman standing next to him. ‘Permetti, ...’, he starts. ‘Ma che permetti! Così mi sporchi l’ambiente!’, responds Paganelli. Cianfanna asks if he is by any chance racist, to which Paganelli responds ‘Ma cosa vuoi che me ne frega di lei, io parlo di te! Razzista...’ and he walks away.

Until this point, the woman is completely ignored by Paganelli, and used as a prop by Cianfanna, both following the hierarchical scheme outlined above. The two men treat her as a passive body supporting their discourse, and do not invite her to speak. Paganelli, furthermore, chooses to ignore not only the

presence of the Black woman at his party (an interesting illustration of the ignorance of Black subjects in film and society), but also the possibility of him being racist. This double blind spot refers to both Del Boca's notion of *rimozione* 'to point to the primary mechanism that has blocked Italy's capacity to recall a colonial heritage',¹⁸² and to his privileged position in his societal context, of being able to choose to ignore or forget colonialism, together with the negative consequence in the form of racism.

This changes in what happens next. Cianfanna continues his conversation with the woman, telling her Paganelli likes her, and asking her to get him some more wine. She then responds, in a broken Italian with an English accent, that there is wine standing right next to him, and that he can pour his own glass. In doing so, she communicates to the viewer her specific position in society, and her feelings about this hierarchical system, presenting herself as a confident person, interacting freely with the people around her – contrary to what Cianfanna suggests. It is clear from the way she pronounces her words that she is not a native speaker of Italian, but through her reaction, she points out the idiocy of Cianfanna's behaviour: presenting her as a 'treat' to Paganelli, is clearly his interpretation of performing white 'masculinity'. As a non-Italian outsider, she observes this situation from a distance, and judges according to her own standards. In this sense, this film portrays the two Black characters as people whose presences subtly communicate contestable narratives existing in the contemporary Italian society, which refer back to the colonial past, and which can go unnoticed by those unwilling to acknowledge these injustices.

¹⁸² Derek Duncan, 'Shooting the Colonial Past' (2012), p. 116. Cfr. Angelo Del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani: Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), p. xi.

In his study on nationalism, Leerssen argues that

[h]uman intolerance often tends to fixate on instances where clear-cut categories are blurred or crossed: social upstarts (between classes); homosexuals (between the sexes); and indeed people of mixed racial origin, ‘half-bloods’. In nineteenth century racial thought, this last aspect becomes all-dominant. Miscegenation, so it is believed, will lead to degeneracy. Not only is this seen as a moral betrayal [...], it is also magnified into a biological threat. If humanity is the end result of a Darwinian evolution, then degeneracy is the potential threat that such evolution can be reversed, that later generations will revert to the brutish and inferior standards of bygone ages of lower races.¹⁸³

The focus in Leerssen’s study is on ‘Europe’, but the content strongly centralises Northern Europe. However, to come back to Ben-Ghiat, her observation about nomadic subjects – people who are geographically in-between – as the enemy *par excellence* fits in this larger European pattern of othering ‘in-betweens’.

The specific case of in-betweens as the Italian empire’s internal enemy could be explained bearing in mind Greene’s observation of the anxiety surrounding the ‘peripheral’ status of Italy as a ‘southern’ country in the context of the newly politically defined post- World War II Western World ([Northern] Europe and the U.S) and with the accompanying anxiety of not-belonging – especially taking into account the *questione meridionale*. At the same time, however, Italy was a border territory as well in terms of West and East, since it had a strong communist base and it had to redefine itself after the lost war.

¹⁸³ Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: a Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), p. 212.

Therefore, it became the focus of attention in the immediate post World War II period, adding another layer to its in-between status: Kaeten Mistry argues that the 1948 Italian election became ‘an allegory of the cold war in American minds and [...] this early cold war flashpoint had profound ramifications for both countries’; the election was ‘a key catalyst in [the] conversation [of defining the contours of a cold war and identifying the appropriate way to wage it].’¹⁸⁴ In a certain sense, ‘in-betweenness’ fits Italy’s position on a European, ‘Western’, and global scale.

Whereas Cianfanna firstly undermines the woman by presenting her as a sort of ‘treat’ to Paganelli, and later treating her as a servant when he asks her for wine, he comes across as the clown of the scene, too insensitive to ‘read the room’, and only thinking about food and conquering women. Paganelli’s choice to ignore her, however, is a signifier of his privilege. In this light, the scene in which Adriana walks on a film set, passing a Black woman without even noticing her, points to the option she has to ignore her. However, for the viewers of the film, she is there, just as the Black wordless character. Most scholars in the Italian context not coming from a non-Italian heritage or ethnicity, they speak themselves from a privileged platform of belonging, arguably willing to ignore these Black Other characters.¹⁸⁵

Here, we can come back to silence as a mode of communication, since it is exactly the silence of and surrounding this specific character of the Black Other

¹⁸⁴ Cfr. Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of Cold War. Waging Political Warfare, 1945–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 4, 20.

¹⁸⁵ At the Black Portraiture II conference, I was part of the one panel that dealt with ‘Black Italy’. We were all White scholars. See <<http://www.aiscli.it/>> for the Associazione italiana di studi sulle culture e letterature di lingua inglese (AISCLI) Winter 2015 newsletter, for which I wrote a summary of the conference.

that strikes me in *Io la conoscevo bene*. In the following chapters, I examine two layers of the complex and contradictory ‘silences’ surrounding the films that form part of the corpus of this research. What is not verbally expressed in the films, but nevertheless communicated through characters’ behaviour (expression), physical appearance, profilmic and filmic positions, and film sound and editing, I call the cinematographic silence. Characters that seem ‘silenced’ through not getting a chance to speak, as is the case with *Io la conoscevo bene* and *L’eclisse* (and *Amarcord*), or who speak a foreign, incomprehensible and untranslated or wrongly translated language, such as the woman at the party in *Io la conoscevo bene* (*Lo sceicco bianco*, *Il moralista*, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, *Riusciranno i nostri eroi*) turn out to communicate physically and sonically social constructions, norms and hegemonic rules surrounding the issues of Italian identity and of in- and exclusion. Their silence speaks to us (Foucault) if we look beyond spoken words – and that possibility is exactly what makes the medium of film unique.

Secondly, the ‘obscured film history’, critical and scholarly silence concerning these characters, illustrate a lack of acknowledgement of structures of racialisation, prejudices and stereotypes in these specific films.¹⁸⁶ Italian film, but also memory of Italian film (history) can inform us about Italy’s colonial past and its narratives. The construction of the concept of the Black Other that is investigated below therefore accounts for both the time in which the films were made, and for contemporary Italy.¹⁸⁷ An analysis of the double silence that these

¹⁸⁶ ‘Obscured film history’ is a term I borrow from Ben-Ghiat; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, ‘Italian Fascism’s empire cinema’, in Sandra Ponzanesi and Marguerite Waller, *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 20-31 (p. 20).

¹⁸⁷ The team of the fascinating AHRC project entitled ‘Italian Cinema Audiences’, which includes a website with 160 video-interviews with audiences of neorealist films between 1945 and now, organised a workshop at

characters suffer from can offer insight into current debates surrounding a possible lack of acknowledgment of the Italian colonial past, and more broadly, issues of suppression and othering.

The project of the hundred Italian films that need to be saved, initiated in 2008 by the *Giornata degli autori* during the Venice International Film Festival, included *Io la conoscevo bene* in its prestigious list.¹⁸⁸ As such, the film is reconfirmed as part of the Italian cultural heritage.¹⁸⁹ We can wonder, therefore, how much impact the (memories of the) film has in contemporary Italy, and how a postcolonial perspective on this film could offer the possibility of shedding new light on a discussion about racism and (neo-) colonialism in Italy today.¹⁹⁰

The character of the Black Other echoes in many ways the colonial racializing narrative that was never refuted on a national scale after World War II in Italy, as discussed in the following chapters.

However, since the films that form part of the corpus of this research are

the Univeristy of London on 18 November 2016 entitled 'Cinema and Memory'. As argued there by one of the co-investigators, Catherine O'Rawe, the interviews conducted with people between the age of seventy and ninety, who talk about events of fifty years ago, are more indicative of the time of the conduction of the interviews, than of the time they are referring to in the interviews. <<http://italiancinemaaudiences.org/>>.

¹⁸⁸ The list, *I cento film italiani da salvare*, was edited by Fabio Ferzetti, film critic of *Il messaggero*, and collaborators included film director Gianni Amelio, Gian Piero Brunetta, Giovanni De Luna, Gianluca Farinelli, Giovanna Grignaffini, Paolo Mereghetti, Morando Morandini, Domenico Starnone and Sergio Toffetti.

¹⁸⁹ On Youtube, various emblematic scenes are watched thousands of times, in some cases, tens of thousands of times. The film was put on Youtube in its entirety (with terrible quality) and after two months it had already almost ten thousand hits. See for instance <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofJEYxITQKs>> [accessed 14 November 2016)].

¹⁹⁰ <http://www.corriere.it/spettacoli/08_febbraio_28/elenco_cento_film_d83cacd8-e5ce-11dc-ab61-0003ba99c667.shtml>.

presented as comedies, this behaviour – and the anxiety of not-belonging – is mocked, and as a consequence criticized, if not ridiculed, through a grotesque portrayal of the Italian, heterosexual, male, middle-class interpretation of self.

Through an analysis of a thus far ignored, but nevertheless pivotal character in *Io la conoscevo bene*, we could conclude that the film on the one hand portrays in a comical and grotesque (see below) manner the ignorance of characters who are not able to acknowledge (references to) Italy's colonial past and racialization in the Italian society. On the other hand, we might answer to the question of who knows whom well, that it is Adriana's last Black friend knowing her well.

Images



1 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (04.28)



2 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (20.33)



3 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (01.05.12)



4 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (01.40.49)



5 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (01.41.02)



6 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (01.41.00)



7 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (01.40.55)



8 Still *Io la conoscevo bene*, Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965 (01.40.58)

2. “How do they show themselves?” Approaching the *commedia all’italiana*

This chapter engages with the notion of the *commedia all’italiana* and its traditional theoretical principles and binaries. In chapter one, I illustrated that racism is connected on a fundamental level to the Italian colonial enterprises and its propaganda. Since the colonial enterprises laid at the basis of the formation of Italy as a modern nation state, the colonial narrative was crucial for the creation of a sense of a national identity. After World War II, the focus was on the present and future, which emphasises the role cinema could offer in a re-construction of *italianità*.¹⁹¹ In the film *Io la conoscevo bene*, the character I identify as the Black Other functions as a blank slate onto which characteristics that ‘the Italian’ ought not to possess, are projected, in order not to identify with them on a conscious level. The structure of the film brings to the fore a critical perspective of this behaviour. In this chapter, and the following chapters, I argue that this is not an extraordinary exception, since many *commedie all’italiana* display an echo of, and/or critique on, narratives of this kind, as they deal specifically with the notion, and the performativity, of *italianità* and its tragic, and/or comedic aspects. I recognise in the *commedia all’italiana* an overall tendency to denaturalise a presumed Italian identity. Coming back to the title of *Io la conoscevo bene*, we can then ask ourselves, ‘who is looking at whom?’¹⁹²

Tackling the *commedia all’italiana* from various angles and perspectives creates the possibility of identifying a corpus, which is analysed in the following

¹⁹¹ Cfr. Liliana Ellena, ‘Geografie della razza nel cinema italiano del primo dopoguerra 1945-1955’, in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. by Gaia Giuliani (Milan: Mondadori, 2015), pp. 17-31 (p. 17).

¹⁹² Rey Chow, *The Rey Chow Reader*, ed. by Paul Bowman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), ebook.

chapters. Below, I therefore approach the label of the *commedia all'italiana* by discussing academic perspectives on the notion.

I particularly intend to discuss and question the scholarly binaries surrounding the *commedia all'italiana*, analogous to the opposition that finds itself at the foundation of this research, that of Black and white. These binaries include comedy<drama (*commedia all'italiana* is often contrasted to neorealism); genre<auteur (as argued by Andrea Bini, '[t]he opposition between artistically valid auteur film and the "artisan" production of genre directors is a Crocian heritage we must get rid of once and for all'¹⁹³); female<male (as both Natalie Fullwood and Bini argue, *commedia all'italiana* strongly focuses on male protagonists and sexualises women, while there are some famous exceptions,¹⁹⁴ and I add some of these exceptions to their lists in the following chapters, and also intend to discuss the 'feminine' aspects of the imaginary of Italy and comedy); and periphery<hegemony (whereas Maurizio Grande describes the *commedia all'italiana* as 'the epic of failure, seen not like a mechanism that introduces to adulthood and "teaches" access to society anymore [as in classical comedy], but as a permanent condition of living with no center or periphery', I would argue that both centre and periphery are present, and are often contrasted to one another in a

¹⁹³ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film: Comedy, Italian Style* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p. 203.

¹⁹⁴ Bini mentions that '[o]ne significant example is Antonio Pietrangeli, author of beautiful female portraits in movies such as *Adua e le compagne* (1960), *La parmigiana*, *La visita* (1964), and *Io la conoscevo bene*, before his premature death in 1968' (p. 203). Fullwood considers the male/female binary a central aspect of the *commedia all'italiana*, and considers *L'impiegato* and in which a female manager is the leading role, a 'rare example' of a *commedia* in which a female protagonist is in charge. Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space: Comedy, Italian Style* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), p. 8.

comical, critical manner.¹⁹⁵). Furthermore, I intend to discuss the notions of *italianità*, comedy, and the question of how these two notions are related.

Compared to the term neorealism, little academic attention is paid to the notion of *commedia all'italiana*, particularly outside of Italy. Two recent publications on the topic, by Andrea Bini and Natalie Fullwood, are in significant aspects in line with my approach to the *commedia all'italiana*. Shelleen Greene, moreover, offers a perspective on the *commedia all'italiana* and its relationship to the social construct of race, with a focus on two (from my perspective, late) *commedie*: *Pane e cioccolata* (Franco Busati, 1974), and *Mafioso* (Alberto Lattuada, 1962).¹⁹⁶ This particular group of comedy films indeed offers a fascinating point of entry into questions surrounding representations of racial identities, considering three aspects: The relative critical void on this topic, together with the *commedia all'italiana*'s heydays (1950s-1970s) overlapping with a crucial period for the construction, negotiation and redefinition of a new sense of *italianità* after World War II and the loss of the colonies as discussed in chapter one, and the implication that the films portray a typically Italian form of

¹⁹⁵ Maurizio Grande, *La commedia all'italiana* (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 2003), p. 87. I use Bini's translation, cfr. Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 78.

¹⁹⁶ In the English language, five studies on the *commedia all'italiana*, translated as Comedy, Italian Style, have been published between 1986 and 2016: a translation of Aprà and Pistagnesi's study, translated as *Comedy, Italian Style, 1950-1980*, trans. by Richard Kamm (Turin: ERI Edizioni Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1986), Jayne Pilling, *Comedy Italian Style* (1988); Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style: the Golden Age of Italian Film Comedies* (London: Continuum, 2008); Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film: Comedy, Italian Style* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space: Comedy, Italian Style* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016). In the French language, more studies are published on the *commedia all'italiana*. Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2012), chapter 4.

comedy, while its name implies that it discusses something like ‘the comedy that is Italy’, or the ‘comical reality that is Italy’ – much more directly so than the spaghetti Western, or other contemporary cinematic subgenres, such as the *peplum* and the *film operistico*, or more general approaches such as the *giallo* or horror.

Plausible explanations for this theoretical underrepresentation are the binaries introduced above, particularly comedy<‘serious’ (more specifically, neorealist, or *auteur*) films.¹⁹⁷ Having shaped some critical work on the topic, these bipartitions have, at times, impeded nuance, or lowered scholarly interest. Moreover, given the *commedia all’italiana*’s introspective, and often subversive, subtext, combined with a celebration of the common man, I would argue that, overall, scholars were not always at ease with (particular films that were labelled as) *commedie all’italiana* – similarly to what Alan O’Leary now argues surrounding the *cinepanettone*. The fact that neorealist films were less successful at the box office than many *commedie all’italiana*, creating a sense of exclusivity, might have further increased an interest amongst scholars in neorealism as opposed to the former films. In the first part of this chapter, I offer a comparison between these two approaches, as I discuss the general assumptions that *commedia all’italiana* is on the one hand a reaction to, and on the other hand, a continuation of, neorealism.

A group of films distinguishable from contemporary Italian subgenres, the *commedia all’italiana* finds itself somewhere in-between, or actually, outside, the somewhat imposed, or simplified, binary opposition of drama>comedy, implicitly

¹⁹⁷ Over time, the perception of *commedia all’italiana* has changed. Scholars tend to regard this group of films of a ‘higher’ standard than when the films were made.

challenging it. Enrico Giacovelli describes it as

una via di mezzo [tra il film comico e il film drammatico], quella in cui secondo Aristotele sta la virtù. È qualcosa che fa quasi piangere e che preoccupa, ma solo per un attimo; e che fa ridere, ma non troppo, e comunque invitandoci a riflettere.¹⁹⁸

This lack of a watertight definition, and the implicit invitation to reflect on its hybridity, is exactly the starting point of this chapter: I do not intend to provide the reader with a clear-cut definition of the *commedia all'italiana*, since that would be tantamount to killing it. Instead, I consider this group of films to be ‘an “open” genre, a structure (...) able to mix such different elements as the legacy of neorealism and the star system’.¹⁹⁹

However, as opposed to many scholars, including Bini and Fullwood, I avoid the term ‘genre’, since that would imply a strict delineation - in search for a watertight definition, one takes the risk of inoculation as described by Roland Barthes: ‘even the most unconventional movement risks becoming captive to its own critical legacy’.²⁰⁰ Rick Altman, more specifically, points out the problematic rigidity of interpreting films as stemming from, or belonging to, a limited set of

¹⁹⁸ Enrico Giacovelli, *La commedia all'italiana* (Rome: Gremese Editore, 1990), p. 7. This of course still leaves way for various interpretations, and as Giacovelli himself agrees, films such as *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* (Mario Monicelli, 1977) or *L'ingorgo* (Luigi Comencini, 1979) could, according to this definition, be interpreted both as *commedie all'italiana*, and as dramatic films.

¹⁹⁹ Adriano Aprà, and Patrizia Pistagnesi, *Comedy, Italian Style: 1950-1980* (Torino: ERI, 1986), p. 17.

²⁰⁰ Silvia Carlorosi, ‘Neorealism, Cinema of Poetry, and Italian Contemporary Cinema’, in Robert Sklar, Saverio Giovacchini (ed), *Global Neorealism: The Transnational History of a Film Style* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), pp. 240-56 (p. 240).

‘genres’.²⁰¹ The marketing and theorising of films, books, and works of art as forming part of a specific genre, moreover, contains an authoritative subtext, actively suggesting certain interpretations, and leaving other approaches out of consideration. There are, therefore, political and economical components to genre definitions as well (I get back to this below).

From a constructivist perspective, I recognise in literature on the topic an implicit specification of Giacobelli’s description of the *commedia all’italiana* as a ‘via di mezzo’. *Commedie all’italiana* are often interpreted as finding themselves not merely between the notions of ‘drama’ and ‘comedy’ but, more precisely, between the qualities scholars tend to ascribe to the cinematographic branch of neorealism, such as ‘serious’ and ‘realistic’, on the one hand, and on the other hand, films that are considered – and often marketed – as pure forms of humorous ‘entertainment’. With the former, we can think of films produced by makers who do not shy away from the *brutal vision* in neorealist films, an understandable approach in the immediate post World War II reality: ‘a strange symbiosis of violence and humanitarianism, spectacular suffering and benefaction.’²⁰² With the second type, I intend films such as those that contain slapstick humour, visual comedies à la Charlie Chaplin, Jacques Tati, and Totò, or the approach of the more recent film style of the *cinepanettone*.²⁰³ *Commedie all’italiana* are

²⁰¹ Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999). However, he provides his readers with simply more specific genre notions, whereas I argue that the principle of ‘genres’ works exclusively as a tool to simplify and conceptualize, and not while referring to specific (groups of) films, books, etc.

²⁰² Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), p. xix.

²⁰³ On the *cinepanettone*, cfr. Alan O’Leary, ‘The Phenomenology of the cinepanettone’, in *Italian Studies*, Vol. 66 No. 3, November, 2011, pp. 431–43.

therefore said to be regarded as a development of the rural *neorealismo rosa* of films like *Pane, amore e fantasia* (Luigi Comencini, 1955): neorealist/‘serious’ films, with added to them a touch of make-up in the shape of a theatrical humorous mask: as Grande refers to Totò’s ‘masks’, a ‘travestimento comico’.²⁰⁴

Following this narrative, the comedic make-up would have triggered interest amongst cinema-goers who appreciated a certain amount of entertainment, while the films simultaneously offered a ‘neorealist’ critical look towards its particular context, the imagined community of the Italian nation state, and social and political problems within this society. This ‘entertainment’ element also facilitated filmmakers to reach their main scope, which was, indeed, to sell their productions - not offering hidden complex perspectives on the Italian society.²⁰⁵ The hybrid characteristics of the films were an advantage in the context of censorship, since politicians were more critical towards ‘serious’ cinema – particularly neorealism. *Commedie* could thus portray politically and socially more sensitive subjects, without much political interference, with the ‘excuse’ of ‘merely’ being humorous.²⁰⁶ Comedy, apparently, seemed less ‘harmful’.

²⁰⁴ Maurizio Grande, *La commedia all’italiana* (Rome: Bulzoni editore, 2003), p. 262. The terms ‘serious’ and ‘realist’ are between quotation marks, because I question the existence of such clear distinctions between ‘(neo)realist’ and ‘comedy’ films. I get back to this later in this chapter. Cfr. Adriano Aprà and Patrizia Pistagnesi, *Comedy, Italian Style: 1950-1980* (Torino: ERI, 1986), p. 17.

²⁰⁵ ‘Il loro obiettivo principale era, inutile a dirsi, vendere le loro produzioni, e questi film erano soprattutto macchine per fare quattrini facendo ridere il pubblico.’ Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità: La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Editori Laterza, 2011) ebook.

²⁰⁶ Masolino D’Amico, *La commedia all’italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), 26-32. I have written about this in ‘The Grotesque as a Tool. Deconstructing the Imperial Narrative in Two *Commedie all’italiana* by Ettore Scola, *Incontri*, 29 (2014), vol. 2, 43-54. In the chapter on *Il moralista* I get back to the topic of censorship.

In his study on the cinematographic approach of neorealism, generally dated between ca. 1943 - ca. 1955, Christopher Wagstaff argues that '[t]he more a narrative prioritizes the surface level, the more we tend to call it "realist". The more it prioritizes the deeper levels, the more we tend to call it "generic"'.²⁰⁷ Types of 'non-fictional single-level-reference narratives', such as a testimony of a witness, journalists' and historians' narratives, and some documentary films, appeal merely to the surface level, and this is a characteristic of neorealist films as well; the explicit approach of neorealist filmmakers was to create 'storie vere', che 'esistono davvero'.²⁰⁸ The films that are considered *commedie all'italiana* do appeal to this level, but not exclusively: since they simultaneously acknowledge the 'deeper levels', they are considered 'genre films'.²⁰⁹

Regarding the degree of 'realism' as a tool to measure a film's quality has been rightly contested by Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe.²¹⁰ Moreover, I follow Masolino D'Amico in arguing that films that according to critics and scholars belong to the approach of neorealism, often contain an element of comedy in them, and vice versa. D'Amico provides a list of films he names

²⁰⁷ Christopher Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 60.

²⁰⁸ Daniele Comberiati and Linde Luijnenburg, "New Postcolonial Art Forms: Timira as Multi-Genre Object Between Cinema and Literature", Emma Bond, Guido Bonsaver, Federico Faloppa, *Destination Italy: Representing Migration in Contemporary Media and Narrative* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 271-285 (280-281).

²⁰⁹ Zaccagnini states that 'grazie al Neorealismo, la commedia italiana [...] ha mantenuto per molti anni un passo costante accanto ai nostri disagi, ai nostri sogni, ai nostri difetti, alle nostre mediocrità e alle nostre mode. In una parola, al nostro costume'. Edoardo Zaccagnini, *I mostri al lavoro* (Rome: Sovera, 2009).

²¹⁰ Alan O'Leary and Catherine O'Rawe, "Against realism: on a 'certain tendency' in Italian film criticism", in: *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 16 (1), 2001: pp. 107-128.

‘commedie neorealiste’ in which the lines between drama (neorealism) and comedy (*commedia all’italiana*) are not at all clearly visible, such as *Abbasso la miseria!* (Gennaro Righelli, 1945), *Roma, città libera* (Marcello Pagliero, 1948) and *Domenica d’agosto* (Luciano Emmer, 1950).²¹¹ I would add to that list films such as *Proibito rubare* (Luigi Comencini, 1948), and later motion pictures such as *Il sole negli occhi* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1953), *Tutti a casa* (Luigi Comencini, 1960), and *Io la conoscevo bene* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1965). This illustrates the disputable character of these distinctions made by critics and scholars.

Connected to this binary is the line between ‘genre’ and ‘auteur’, drawn for instance by Peter Bondanella - according to Bini, who agrees with the impossibility of this distinction, deriving from Benedetto Croce.²¹² Bondanella differentiates between the films made by Federico Fellini, Roberto Rossellini and Michelangelo Antonioni, and the more ‘popular’ films.²¹³ The former are described as ‘works of unquestionable artistic importance’, so-called ‘film d’auteur’ – he here refers to Francois Truffaut’s notion of ‘auteur’ in his famous ‘Une certaine tendance du cinéma français’ of 1954 – which according to him have a limited amount of viewers, while the latter are films that are made for large groups of people. Whereas neorealism fits in the former category, the *commedia all’italiana* belongs to the second.

While Fullwood follows the genre-auteur distinction, as she opposes films

²¹¹ Masolino D’Amico, *La commedia all’italian. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), p. 56.

²¹² Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 203.

²¹³ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present* (London: Continuum, 1983), pp. 103-95; Adriano Aprà and Patrizia Pistagnesi, *Comedy, Italian Style: 1950-1980* (Torino: ERI, 1986), p. 17.

directed by Federico Fellini to Comedy, Italian Style films,²¹⁴ Bondanella himself points out that Fellini became world famous for his *La dolce vita* (1960) which was immensely popular throughout Italy and abroad. Moreover, as argued also by Bini, many of Fellini's films, especially his earlier ones, display all characteristics and tropes ascribed to the *commedia all'italiana* below.²¹⁵

As stated above, the *commedia all'italiana* is unanimously connected to the historical period of the *boom economico*, something which I find too convenient. Andrea Bini considers the *boom* a myth, in as much as the narrative was constructed in Italian films before it became a reality: 'before being a real event, the "Boom" was the most successful fictional narrative of Italian society'. He analyses films with Alberto Sordi in the 1950s which he considers 'forerunners' of the *commedia all'italiana*, in order to (convincingly) support this assertion. However, he acknowledges himself that the 1950s comedies directed by Monicelli and Fellini juxtapose the comic and the tragic, in which I recognize (as he does) a distinctive trait of the *commedia all'italiana*.²¹⁶ In his (much needed, and excellent) study on the *commedia all'italiana* he situates linearly the itinerary of *commedie all'italiana* from neorealism, to pink neorealism, to forerunners of the *commedia*, to the *commedia*, to late *commedie* which border on the grotesque, and are baroque in nature (and which he does not prefer). I still find this linearity too convenient, as it sits uneasy with the much more complex reality, and find it

²¹⁴ Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space* (2016), p. 139-140, 157, 212 n2. She does, however, note that Alberto Sordi played 'characters that developed many aspects of his later Comedy, Italian Style persona' in *Lo sceicco bianco* and *I vitelloni*, both directed by Fellini, illustrating in her eyes 'the grey area between Comedy, Italian Style and auteur cinema', p. 45.

²¹⁵ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 203.

²¹⁶ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 72.

uneasy to consider films which contain all *commedia all'italiana* elements 'forerunners' since they are not made within the appropriate time frame (see below).

While Bini identifies the *commedia all'italiana* as a complete break from the *commedia dell'arte* tradition of masks and a circular kind of comedy, and also considers his study to be 'the rejection of th[e] commonplace' that *commedia all'italiana* would be 'an evolution, albeit bleak and "satirical," of pink neorealism',²¹⁷ I do trace some older elements of the specific Italian filmic and cultural tradition in *commedie all'italiana*, just as I analyse films that belong to the realm of 'auteur', treating them as *commedie all'italiana* (sometimes with a twist). However, I do agree with Bini that *commedie all'italiana* do not simply consist of combinations of earlier film styles, or approaches – I consider the films a combination of new and old elements. I discuss this in detail below.

Given its hybrid character, there are various ways to present the *commedia all'italiana*. The rest of this chapter is divided into three parts, the first part of which is shaped around the question, what is comedy in the *commedia all'italiana*? The second part discusses the notion of *italianità* in the *commedia all'italiana*. In the third part, I bring the two notions together, approaching the *commedia all'italiana*.

What is comedy?²¹⁸ On the one hand, we can argue that comedy films

²¹⁷ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 2.

²¹⁸ Mathew Bavis quotes cartoonist Saul Steinberg in order to provide an answer: 'trying to define humour is one of the definitions of humour.' Mathew Bavis, *Comedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 1.

contain structural characteristics that invite viewers to laugh, which in most cases reveals the makers' specific intention to make audiences laugh. On the other hand, there is the manner in which films actually affect audiences, which is less predictable. I discuss both these aspects below.

To describe the *commedia all'italiana*, Peter Bondanella narrows the notion of 'comedy' down, describing it as a 'tragicomedy bordering on the grotesque'.²¹⁹ The debate on the precise signification of the literary genre of tragicomedy goes back many centuries. Renaissance poet Giambattista Guarini, following Aristotle's supposition that 'characters of high rank are fitting to tragedy, and those of humble station are suited to comedy', offers a definition of the tragicomedy: it is 'to imitate through a stage spectacle an invented action, combining all those tragic and comic parts under a single dramatic form, to the end of purging by means of pleasure the sadness of the listeners.'²²⁰ David Hirst describes tragi-comedy as seeing 'the evil, the corrupt potential of humanity, the danger; but refus[ing] to accept that it must triumph'.²²¹

There are some interesting things to note here, but I find Bondanella's description in many aspects problematic. A much newer field, film genre theory stems for large parts from literary theory.²²² The tragicomedy, which originated in

²¹⁹ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 145.

²²⁰ Allan H. Gilbert, *Literary Criticism. Plato to Dryden* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 508 and 661.

²²¹ David L. Hirst, *Tragicomedy* (London, New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 122. I come back to this and Henri Bergson's notion of comedy later in this chapter.

²²² Cfr. Steve Neale, 'Questions of Genre', in *Film and Theory. An Anthology*, ed. Robert Stam and Toby Miller (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), pp.157-78, Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999).

literary theory, is often described in the context of theatre plays, as we can see from Guarini's comment, and *commedia all'italiana* has strong connections to the theatre as well (see below).²²³ However, taking into account the problematic aspects of genre theory outlined above, even more problems arise when applying to cinema the terminology which is created around literature and theatre plays.²²⁴ Film genre categories used by film scholars are, in fact, often 'a strange hybrid of elements of the classical notion, of rule-of-thumb generalizations about narrative stereotypes, (...) and of labels used by the cinema industry to give a market identity to commercial products.'²²⁵ Film's unimedial quality offers more than textual plots. Thinking back to *Io la conoscevo bene*, aspects such as lighting, compositions, sounds, and silence, can be significant in order to examine the viewers' experiences, and in order to reach to a fuller understanding of how the film is structured. Interpreting a film by analysing predominantly the textual plots – or, for that matter, exclusively the visual language – is not a productive approach if one intends to grasp cultural implications of specific films.

Scholars' interpretation of *commedie all'italiana* as tragicomedies therefore informs us to a greater extent about the critical context of cinema, and to a lesser extent about the structure of the films themselves. Moreover, as Bini argues as well, there is the question of how unique this 'darker element' (the

²²³ Cfr. Robert Henke, *Pastora Transformations. Italian Tragicomedy and Shakespeare's Late Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997); Erik Gunderson, *Laughing Awry: Plautus and Tragicomedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²²⁴ I here intend theatre plays if read as literature, and as a script, instead of considered in the context of the theatre where the play is performed, each night differently and therefore uniquely.

²²⁵ Christopher Wagstaff, *Italian Neorealist Cinema: An Aesthetic Approach* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 60.

tragic) added to comedy is; film director Mario Monicelli himself observed that ‘Italian comicità is tragic: we laugh at what we can.’²²⁶ This is why I argue in favour of a focus on the second part of Bondanella’s description of the *commedia all’italiana*. I would argue that the films that are analysed in the following chapters are intrinsically grotesque - contrary to both Bini, who associates only the last phase of the *commedia all’italiana* with the grotesque (and in my opinion, with some disdain), and Fullwood, who does not mention the notion of the grotesque even once.²²⁷ During his discussion on *I mostri*, which he considers a grotesque film, Bini argues that ‘what makes the characters in the movie so monstrous is not so much their lack of morality but rather the fact that they perform their enjoyment shamelessly,’ while they express out in the open what should remain hidden.²²⁸ He associates the grotesque (as depicted in *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* and *Lo scopone scientifico*, two films that are briefly discussed in this study as well) with the twilight of the genre, dominated by pessimism (p. 200), and argues it has baroque undertones.²²⁹ I do not associate the grotesque as an approach in general, with negativity, and argue below why I consider it to be a fundamental feature of *commedia all’italiana* in general.

Not containing the particular comedic atmosphere of the grotesque exclusively or continuously, one can come to a better understanding of the structure of these films when considering the grotesque as their foundational

²²⁶ Monicelli Pietro Pintus (ed.), *Commedia all’italiana. Parlano i protagonisti* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 1985), pp. 148–55. Cfr. Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 2.

²²⁷ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 104 223-4, n10.

²²⁸ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), pp. 148-9

²²⁹ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 189.

attribute; The configuration of the movies in question implies a commentary on societal patterns by grotesquely exaggerating typical behaviour of ‘Italians’, ridiculing and underlining with a comical undertone political and sociological ‘realities’ accepted by protagonists in the Italian context as experienced or perceived by the film makers.²³⁰ The films are, in this sense, simultaneously pure forms of ‘dramatic’ and ‘comedic’ film, rather than the common assumption that they would offer a more complex continuation of this theoretical binary opposition in the shape of a ‘tragi-comedy’.

Not exclusively applied in the context of literature or theatre plays, the English word grotesque derives from the Italian word ‘grotto’, and more specifically, from ‘pittura grottesca’, a painting found in a grotto. It refers to rooms in ancient Roman buildings which were excavated to reveal murals. The grotto is,

like the labyrinth or the crypt, a disorienting and threatening place that inflames anxiety and fear. It is also a potential place of spatial internment that echoes the state of being confined within the physical limits of grotesque bodies.²³¹

In the context of cinema, the grotesque can be seen as neither a genre nor a style, but rather a worldview that expresses itself through ‘l’abbassamento e la messa in questione dell’identità e della gerarchia dei valori costituiti’.²³² It is an

²³⁰ Focusing on the notion of the tragi-comedy, Gunderson offers an interesting in-depth analysis of Fellini’s *I clowns* (1970), focusing on the issue of genre, among other notions. Erik Gunderson, *Laughing Awry: Plautus and Tragicomedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²³¹ Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, *Grotesque* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 5.

²³² Roberto De Gaetano, *Il corpo e la maschera. Il grottesco nel cinema italiano* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1999), pp. 7-8. He refers to Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnevalesque.

exaggeration, deformation, and hyperbole of a character or situation that refers to a counterpart in the ‘real’ world – the (neo) ‘realist’, referential aspect – consequentially functioning as a magnifying glass. The grotesque is moreover characterised by a constant balance between a comic atmosphere and a tragic or even horrific one; between comic exaggeration and monstrous depiction. In one of the most iconic *commedie all’italiana*, *I mostri* (Dino Risi, 1963) for instance, the protagonists of all twenty episodes are literally presented as monstrous products of their time (the early 1960s) and place (Rome, Italy), nevertheless inviting viewers to laugh, because of the theatrical, exaggerated absurdity of their behaviour.

Considering this depiction of a simultaneously comedic, and tragic ‘Italy’, the clear distinctions between drama and comedy are proven to be insufficient – at least in the case of the *commedia all’italiana*. However, the films are still considered, and marketed, as comedies, affecting the way in which these films, and possibly the society they address, are approached by viewers, critics, and eventually, scholars. Interesting in this perspective is that the aforementioned distinctions between comedy and drama contain a gendered, and consequentially, hierarchical subtext. In a study on the figure of the ‘unruly woman’ in film, Kathleen Rowe considers a long list of ‘attitudes or perspectives’ associated with either comedy or drama according to literary theory (and in particular Albert Cook) including separation, isolation, and the grand, which all belong to tragedy, and connection, integration, community, and bourgeois belonging to comedy.²³³ She concludes that, while the binary male>female is absent in the grid she created, ‘a closer look suggests that comedy may indeed bear a relation to the cultural

²³³ Both Guarini’s and Hirst’s abovementioned interpretations of the two extremes, fit in this scheme.

construct of femininity similar to tragedy's connection with masculinity.²³⁴

Tragedy's focus is on the individual, she argues, whereas comedies are centered around the social (confirming Aristotle's supposition mentioned above), aligning it with values traditionally associated with the feminine.

Even though Rowe applies these notions to an American context, similar patterns can be detected surrounding the notion of comedy in the Italian tradition – with comedies also considered 'less harmful' as argued above. If we go back to the aforementioned interpretation of the *commedia all'italiana* as 'the comedy that is Italy', and take into account the uncertain geopolitical position 'Italy' as a nation state found itself in in the immediate post World War II reality, we could read the identification of the peninsula as a comedy as an inferiority complex; 'the comedy that is Italy' as opposed to the masculine, white (-er), strong, North (Europe). This is illustrated in the analysis of *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, discussed in chapter five, and further discussed below.

Next to the structural characteristics, there is the question of how a comedy films affect viewers. Similar to musical taste, humour is subjective by definition: the indicator for what is considered humorous by a large group of people, is to know whether a film that is presented as a comedy has a certain amount of success with its viewers.²³⁵ In his study on the *commedia all'italiana*, for instance, Masolino D'Amico does not provide the reader with a definition,

²³⁴ Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman. Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), pp. 103-04.

²³⁵ The difficulty of defining humour is discussed in Roberto De Gaetano, *Il corpo e la maschera. Il grottesco nel cinema italiano* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1999), p. 10. I will get back to the importance of the audience later in this chapter.

other than stating simply that it is a ‘film comico’, defining that in turn as ‘quello che come tale viene offerto a chi apprende il giornale dice [...] “Stasera vorrei vedere un film comico (o allegro, o divertente). Che cosa danno?”’²³⁶ The popularity of the *commedia all’italiana*, and thus its ‘humorous success’, is confirmed in the fact between 1945 and 1975, more than 50 percent of the entire Italian filmic productions were considered comedies.²³⁷

In chapter one, I mention the in-between status of Italy, which would welcome a ‘unifying’ type of film. Humour, Peter Jordan observes, can be used as ‘a defence mechanism that trivializes stressful or psychologically overly demanding circumstances’, and more generally as a kind of ‘social lubricant’. The traumatic immediate post World War II Italian reality, and the internal heterogeneity as argued in chapter one, makes the rise of the *commedia all’italiana* more understandable, since laughter functions

to manipulate the emotions of others to the benefit of the laughter and mitigate problems or social ambivalence within a group, particularly by dampening friction and violent competition between individuals and establishing dominant and subordinate relationships.

Jordan further asserts that ‘the contagious nature of laughter can function to couple the emotions and coordinate behaviours of the individuals within a group.’²³⁸ Given the traumatic experiences of the lost colonies and a lost war, this

²³⁶ Masolino D’Amico, *La commedia all’italiana*, p. 16.

²³⁷ Lorenzo Quaglietti, *Storia economico- politica del cinema italiano: 1945–80* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1980).

²³⁸ Peter Jordan, *The Venetian Origins of the Commedia dell’arte* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 13.

binding element was much needed, as attested by the *italiano medio* protagonists in the films that are discussed in the following chapters.

Pathos is indeed a key element in the *commedie* in order to reach a sense of collectivity.²³⁹ The *commedie all'italiana*'s 'relatability' can result in a feeling of pride; thinking back to Jordan, the films are 'about us', about local happenings, and local people.²⁴⁰ The first phase of spectatorship of typical *commedie all'italiana* is therefore recognition, celebration, and collectivity, implying the existence of other characters that do not belong in order to construct them out of this collectivity.

A certain disengagement, however, is required in order to laugh about a character's comical situation. Henri Bergson argues that what happens when we laugh is that someone unable to adjust to the changes that her/his environment has been through, gets trapped in her/his own 'mechanical elasticity'.²⁴¹ The ones who recognise this mechanism, laugh because of the consequences. For instance, if a woman runs too fast and therefore fails to see a stone on the furthermore flat pavement, she trips:

as a result [...] of rigidity or of momentum, the muscles continue [...] to perform the same movement when the circumstances of the case called

²³⁹ Mariapia Comand, *Commedia all'italiana* (Milan: Il Castoro, 2010), p. 10.

²⁴⁰ The word 'relatable' was introduced into the English language by TV-show host Rosie O'Donnell in 1996, and has since become a measurement, often used by journalists, to critically rate a work of art, a theatre play or a book. See Rebecca Mead, "The Scourge of 'Relatability'", *The New Yorker*, August 1, 2014: <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/scourge-relatability?utm_source=tny&utm_campaign=generalsocial&utm_medium=facebook&mbid=social_facebook> [accessed 18 December 2017].

²⁴¹ Henri Bergson, *Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Claudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1913) p. 6a.

for something else. That is the reason of the [woman's] fall, and also of the people's laughter.²⁴²

Though Bergson's perspective on comedy is limited, a similar kind of laughter is caused by protagonists in the comedies discussed here. More specifically for this research, the – to local audiences, recognisable – society has gone through, and is going through, rapid changes, such as losing colonies and the war, and a sudden booming economy. Protagonists of *commedie all'italiana* often fail to change habits that were expected from a pre-World War II reality, continuing to metaphorically run in the same pace, whereas viewers realise that the context in which protagonists find themselves has changed. For example, a racist attitude towards colonial subjects was considered appropriate during the Italian imperial nation state under Mussolini's rule, but seems outdated and counterproductive in a society which no longer rules these former colonies, and in a European context in which colonialism causes heated debates. This racism, therefore, reveals more evidently the underlying layer of anxiety surrounding one's own identity – how to be(have) in this rapidly changed and confusing imagined community of Italy, also taking into consideration the rapid economical growth known as the *boom*?

Recognizing this mechanism implies not only that the viewer understands the context of the characters, but also that they recognise in themselves this 'rigidity of momentum'. Mikhail Bakhtin, when describing the notion of 'grotesque realism', notes that

the people's festive laughter is also directed at those who laugh: the people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. [...] This is

²⁴² Henri Bergson, *Laughter* (1913), p. 5b.

one of the essential differences of the people's festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times.²⁴³

In other words, viewers recognise that they/we are all unable to change at the same pace as their/our environment changes. The viewer's moment of detachment, therefore, is not cynical or purely rational, but rather humorous and festive, containing a critical, alert, undertone.

What, then, constitutes *italianità* in the *commedia all'italiana*? Combining the findings below with the tropes discussed in the introduction of this study – *romanità*, Catholicism, food, *fare bella figura*, and prostitution – we can come to a better understanding of constructed notions of *italianità*. The tropes appear so frequently in films that are considered *commedie all'italiana*, that I regard them part of the cinematographic social construct of 'Italy', since this particular group of films is presented as 'typically Italian' (*all'italiana*). As argued in chapter one, this presumed identity of 'the Italian' is moreover at least partially, if not predominantly, to be found in opposing the imaginary of a non-Italian Black Other, and therefore, the focus is here largely on the concept of race. However, taking into account these tropes, I explore questions of class, gender, and sexuality, as well as the theme of religion. Consequentially, the approach to these themes in the following chapters is of an intersectional nature.²⁴⁴

Dino Risi expressed his discomfort with the label *commedia all'italiana*:

²⁴³ Bakhtin in Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 201.

²⁴⁴ Cfr. Ange Marie Hancock, *Intersectionality. An Intellectual History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Perché ostinarsi a dire commedia all'italiana? Quelle che vengono fatte in America non vengono chiamate all'americana. Siccome i critici amano le etichette, proporrei questa: la commedia all'italiana come la definiscono i critici all'italiana.²⁴⁵

Whilst the director has a valid point, the films focus nearly without exception specifically on the Italian society and its inhabitants – illustrating the referential, 'realist' aspect of the grotesque.²⁴⁶ Whereas many films were transnational collaborations and co-productions, the large majority of the films is made in *Cinecittà*, in Rome, funded and produced predominantly by Carlo Ponti and Dino De Laurentiis,²⁴⁷ made by Italian directors such as Mario Monicelli, Luigi Comencini, Dino Risi, Ettore Scola and Luigi Zampa, and nearly all actors are native Italians.²⁴⁸ The films are predominantly set in Italy, and the language is

²⁴⁵ Dino Risi in Enrico Giacobelli, *La commedia all'italiana* (Rome Gremese Editore, 1990), p. 12.

²⁴⁶ Aldo Viganò describes comedy as 'un "genere" privo di mitologia', of which the main points of reference are therefore not something 'arcaico' or universal, but quotidian and contingent, which is exactly why the adjective *Italian* is used for the *commedia all'italiana*. See p. 100. Age argues, '[noi, registi della commedia all'italiana] abbiamo interpretato ciò che avveniva perché lo credevamo giusto nei confronti del pubblico'. Age in *Commedia all'italiana. Parlano I protagonisti*, ed. Pietro Pintus (Rome: Gangemi editore, 1985), 20. Ettore Scola stated: 'Partivo dalla osservazione della realtà, dalla voglia di raccontare *il nostro paese*. [...] Il mio non è mai stato un cinema di fantasia, ma un cinema di osservazione' (my emphasis). Interview with Ettore Scola on 19 March 2009: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSTBchUcso0&feature=fvw>> [accessed 18 December 2017].

²⁴⁷ There were other producers, such as Franco Cristaldi, but the majority of the *commedie all'italiana* seems to have been produced by Ponti and De Laurentiis.

²⁴⁸ Masolino D'Amico, *La commedia all'italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), pp. 18-20.

close to exclusively Italian.²⁴⁹ The films had a huge success at the Italian box offices. The name *commedia all'italiana* therefore rightfully implies that the films discuss (and address) Italy and Italians – however problematic generalizations of such abstract and intangible notions are, and however prescriptive its implications can become. More than an implication, it is a willed assertion, since it can be argued that there was a momentum to develop an entertaining cinematographic form and tradition for national/local audiences about national/local life, and appealing to a wide audience, for both commercial and cultural reasons.

Dino Risi's reference to America, furthermore, illustrates that the *commedia all'italiana* was often interpreted and presented as an alternative to Hollywood comedies (which is another motivation for the initiative outlined above).²⁵⁰ Going back to the cinema of the interbellum, Francesco Savio describes Hollywood film as the fundamental source of inspiration for Italian comedy films that were made during Mussolini's reign.²⁵¹ He argues, however, that films made during this time were 'ostili', and that these films exclusively dealt with 'scambi

²⁴⁹ If the films that are not set in Italy, as is the case for instance with *Il diavolo* (Gian Luigi Polidoro, 1963), in which the protagonist goes to Sweden for business, the protagonist is still portrayed as grotesquely Italian, and his Italianness is emphasised exactly through an opposition between him and the Swedish people he meets. The plot is, therefore, told from an Italian perspective. In terms of the Italian language, if in some rare occasions another language is spoken in a *commedia all'italiana*, the protagonist is still an Italian, and s/he still speaks Italian. In the following chapters, examples of this type of 'exception' are given. In these cases, too, the plot is thus explained to viewers from an Italian perspective.

²⁵⁰ Nino Manfredi, for instance, considered Charlie Chaplin a source of inspiration for all makers of, and actors in, *commedie all'italiana*. Nino Manfredi in Pietro Pintus, Pietro Pintus (red.), *Commedia all'italiana. Parlano i protagonisti*, Gangemi Editore, 1997, p. 137.

²⁵¹ Francesco Savio, *Ma l'amore no. Realismo, formalismo, propaganda e telefoni bianchi nel cinema italiano di regime (1930-1943)* (Milan: Sanzogno, 1975), p. v.

di persona, inversioni di identità, nomi fittizi, travestimenti e – perfino – svarioni o brogli anagrafici.’²⁵² The disdain with which the scholar approaches the *telefoni bianchi* films is representative of the academic attitude towards these films, both then and now. Roughly made between 1930 and 1943, they were posthumously entitled ‘telefoni bianchi’ after Dino Risi’s *commedia all’italiana Telefoni bianchi* (1976), referring to the white telephones that often featured in the films, and which were considered a status symbol.²⁵³ Also described as ‘cinema decò’, since they were often set in Art Deco architectural spaces with Art Deco decorations, the films were mostly set in expensive houses, and, indeed, plots often dealt with mixing up identities, encounters between characters from different classes, and other rather abstract and universal comedic set-ups, which often seemed inspired by American comedy films.²⁵⁴ The development of a specific Italian type of filmic comedy, which referred back to Italian theatrical and aesthetic traditions, indeed took place after World War II, as I illustrate below.²⁵⁵

Hollywood films dominated the Italian post-war movie theatres;²⁵⁶ in many

²⁵² On *telefoni bianchi* films, see M. Mida e L. Quaglietti, *Dai telefoni bianchi al neorealismo* (Rome: Laterza, 1980).

²⁵³ Savio points out that the telephones were not always white. ‘Ma nero o bianco che fosse, quel telefono, simbolo o feticcio, istituiva tra i lontani personaggi un sistema fittizio di rapporti, atto a provocare, e a facilitare, la commedia degl’inganni e degli equivoci’ (p. vii).

²⁵⁴ Roberto Campari, ‘Commedia italiana e commedia americana’, in *Commedia all’italiana. Angolazioni controcampi*, ed. Riccardo Napolitano (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 1985), pp. 29-36.

²⁵⁵ Some *telefoni bianchi* directors continued to produce comedy films (*all’italiana*) after World War II, such as Camillo Mastrocinque, Mario Mattoli, and Vittorio De Sica, which would make more openly reference to specific Italian realities.

²⁵⁶ Masolino D’Amico, *La commedia all’italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), pp. 20-26. Stephen Gundle states that the predominance of Hollywood films in after World War II Italy can be explained because of the reputation of the Americans as liberators of Italy during World

commedie all'italiana, such as *Un Americano a Roma* (Steno, 1954), and in *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1973) posters of Hollywood films are shown in the background, both referring to the Italian film theatres' reality, and possibly referencing movies that inspired filmmakers. Motion pictures with Italian subjects were therefore distinguishable from mainstream Hollywood comedies, creating a specific, local kind of cinematic comedy, and containing tropes which were presented as 'typically Italian'. Bini argues that the "Americanization" in *commedie all'italiana* is definitely present in terms of 'Italian middle- class ambitions (individualism, competition, consumerism, etc.)', referring to the *boom*, but that the difference was that the success ethic of Hollywood comedy was lacking, 'where the happy ending is reserved for those who deserve it.'²⁵⁷ Indeed, I would argue that the grotesque undertone is unique to this Italian kind of comedy film.

A film that is often described as the prototype of the *commedia all'italiana*, *Divorzio all'italiana* (Pietro Germi, 1961) for instance, suggests that the protagonists' divorce is a typically *Italian* one – and indeed, focuses on the failure element of the protagonists. Similar examples of famous *commedie all'italiana* with titles suggesting that the plots are 'typically Italian' include *Matrimonio*

War II. Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow. The Italian Communists and the Challenge of Mass Culture, 1943-1991* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp. 31-35. Moreover, during fascism the import of Hollywood films was limited; from 1939 until the end of the war there was a ban on any importation of Hollywood films. When this ban was lifted in the immediate postwar era, these films became all the more appealing to the Italian public. Masolino D'Amico, *La commedia all'italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975*, p. 20. He adds that, '[g]ià durante gli anni del fascismo, quando le importazioni per quanto larghe erano limitate, le predilezioni degli utenti delle sale cinematografiche italiane si orientavano assai nettamente verso il prodotto d'oltreoceano' (21).

²⁵⁷ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 108.

all'italiana (Vittorio De Sica, 1964), *Made in Italy* (Nanni Loy, 1965), *Capriccio all'italiana* (various directors, 1967), and *In nome del popolo italiano* (Dino Risi, 1971).

Itself occasionally containing an element of the grotesque, the theatrical form *commedia dell'arte*,²⁵⁸ famous for using mask types (such as il Dottore, Arlecchino, Pulcinella, and il Capitano) and (partial) improvisation, is considered the foundation of the *commedia all'italiana* by Italian and Anglo-American scholars and filmmakers, emphasising the particularly Italian roots of the *commedia all'italiana*.²⁵⁹ This makes the scholarly link to the theatrical 'genre' of the tragicomedy all the more meaningful. The international twin symbols of theatre – the laughing mask of Thalia, Ancient Greek muse and personification of comedy, song, and dance, and the crying mask of Melpomene, Ancient Greek muse and personification of tragedy – representing the two core communicative emotions of universal human experience',²⁶⁰ are at the core of the *commedia all'italiana* as well, as plots and characters simultaneously touch upon these two extreme sides of the same coin. The link between the *commedia all'italiana* and the *commedia dell'arte* is even more overtly confirmed in the fact that outside of

²⁵⁸ For further reading on the *commedia dell'arte*, see Kathleen Marguerite Lea, *Italian Popular Comedy; A Study in the Commedia dell'arte, 1560-1620* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), Lynne Lawner, *Harlequin on the Moon: commedia dell'arte and the visual arts* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1998), John Rudlin, *Commedia dell'arte, an Actor's Handbook*, (London, New York: Routledge, 1994).

²⁵⁹ Nino Manfredi in Pietro Pintus (red.), *Commedia all'italiana. Parlano i protagonisti* (Gangemi Editore, 1997), 137; Ettore Scola in Mino Monicelli, *Cinema italiano: ma cos'è questa crisi?* (Laterza, 1979), 139; Aldo Viganò, *Storia del cinema: Commedia italiana in cento film* (Genova: Le Mani, 1995), 11; D'Amico, De Gaetano. See also Comand, *Commedia all'italiana*, p. 42.

²⁶⁰ Peter Jordan, *The Venetian Origins of the Commedia dell'arte* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 11.

Italy, the *commedia dell'arte* was referred to as 'la commedia all'italiana'.²⁶¹

In an episode of *Se permettete, parliamo di donne* (Ettore Scola, 1964), there is a literal shift between Thalia and Melpomene. Alvaro (Vittorio Gassman) constantly plays practical jokes with people he meets. He presents himself to everyone as the ultimate clown, continuously tricking his interlocutors, and constantly laughing out loud. However, the moment he steps inside his own home at the end of the episode, his face changes from a constant smile to a cynical, exhausted frown. While outside, his movements were lively and energetic, but inside, he moves slowly, and takes deep breaths. When his ten-year-old son plays a practical joke on his father, the latter reacts furiously: 'a l'età tua stai ancora a fa' sti scherzi! Sempre a fa' il buffone, vero? Che farai tu, nella vita?' This theatrical shift deals with the issue of performance, and suggests that the character embodies either one theatrical mask (Thalia), or the other (Melpomene). However, the undertone is simultaneously a comical one, if one considers the comedic quality of the protagonist's absurd behaviour, and a tragic one, as it is questionable if his behaviour would be beneficial for a healthy upbringing for his child.

As argued above, Bini contests this commonplace relationship between the *commedia dell'arte* and the *commedia all'italiana*. I would argue that one could make some convincing superficial comparisons, such as the theatrical aspects, and the use of stereotypes, but that it is not enough to approach the *commedia all'italiana* in depth, since it is not specific enough. All of above nevertheless emphasises the particularly Italian theatrical characteristics of the *commedia all'italiana*. The comedic make-up mentioned above can be read in a similar light;

²⁶¹ John Rudlin, *Commedia dell'arte, an Actor's Handbook* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 14.

it could be argued that it is the theatrical mask of Thalia that makes the characters and films comedic, while they are set in recognisable, and oftentimes tragic, contexts. The most famous actors of the *commedie* were theatrical actors, known from local theatre productions, and they became the most celebrated Italian actors of their time: Alberto Sordi, Nino Manfredi, Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni, and Ugo Tognazzi.²⁶² The women who played the most prominent roles were Monica Vitti, Stefania Sandrelli, Gina Lollobrigida, Silvana Mangano, Sophia Loren and Claudia Cardinale.²⁶³ Viewers living in Italy knew the actors of the *commedie all'italiana* from the theatre, and the actors often spoke with the accents of a specific region – reconfirming the link with the *commedia dell'arte*, in which actors also often represented a specific Italian region.²⁶⁴ In general, *commedie all'italiana* depended for a large part on the acting of the protagonists, and not on, for instance, special effects, or locations, providing the films with a theatrical atmosphere.

Indeed, Fullwood defines the *commedia all'italiana* as ‘a series of

²⁶² These actors together were also called ‘i mostri’ after the aforementioned film *I mostri* (Dino Risi, 1963).

Landy argues that ‘*Commedia all'italiana* in the 1950s was identified with Vittorio De Sica, Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida, Totò, Marcello Mastroianni, Alberto Sordi, and Vittorio Gassman’, emphasizing as well the crucial role that stars played for the success of the films.

²⁶³ Peter Bondanella does not include Stefania Sandrelli and Silvana Mangano. Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present*, op.cit., p. 144. The observation that the protagonists were almost exclusively male obviously raises issues of gender representations, which will be discussed below. See also Maria Pia Fusco, “Società, famiglia: e la donna?”, in *Commedia all'italiana. Angolazioni controcampi*, ed. by Riccardo Napolitano (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 1985), pp. 131-40.

²⁶⁴ This regional accent was often Roman, as was the case with most films with Alberto Sordi and Nino Manfredi. Ugo Tognazzi spoke with a northern accent, and Marcello Mastroianni and Vittorio Gassman had less strong accents. However, they could all change their accents to different regional accents of Italy.

comedies made between 1958-70 associated with a core group of directors, screenwriters and actors', particularly underlining the importance of the actors, by stating that much of the *commedia all'italiana* 'is a form of comedian comedy, and the genre was predominantly structured around the star performances of (usually male) comedians'.²⁶⁵ In the context of the Italian cinema of the 1950s-1970s, the 'divismo', largely enhanced by mass media culture as portrayed through the character of Marcello in *La dolce vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960), is considered the modern version of mythology in a Barthesian sense.²⁶⁶ As opposed to the unreachable and idealised Hollywood stars, the stars of the *commedia all'italiana* had a certain proximity to the public, both physically, and since they come to incorporate the notion of the *italiano medio*. This 'tangibility' of the actors and their proximity to the public was enhanced exactly because they could be compared to the distant and idealised Hollywood stars. The local actors made Rome into a kind of home-made Hollywood, and the actors into local superstars: *Cinecittà* became 'Hollywood sul Tevere'.²⁶⁷

The most famous example of the new type of local, Italian 'divo' is Alberto Sordi: 'vera epitome dell'"italiano medio"'²⁶⁸, he played an anti-hero nearly without exception. Contrary to American stars like Paul Newman, Marlon

²⁶⁵ Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, Space* (2016), p. 3.

²⁶⁶ Guido Aristarco, *Il mito dell'attore. Come l'industria della star produce il sex symbol* (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1983), 15. Cfr. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), Mariagrazia Fanchi, 'La trasformazione del consumo cinematografico', in *Storia del cinema italiano*, vol. X, 1960-1964, ed. Giorgio De Vicenti, (Venice, Rome: Marsilio Edizioni di Bianco & Nero, 2001), pp. 344-57.

²⁶⁷ Cfr. *Hollywood sul Tevere* (Marco Spagnoli, 2009, documentary).

²⁶⁸ Mariapia Comand, p. 33, Goffredo Fofi, *Alberto Sordi. L'Italia in bianco e nero* (Milan: Mondadori, 2004).

Brando and Clark Gable, their Italian counterparts were not presented as sex symbols in the local media. In *Lo scopone scientifico* (Luigi Comencini, 1972), protagonists Peppino and Antonia are *Italian poveracci*, interpreted by the local heroes Alberto Sordi and Silvana Mangano, who look dirty, have cheap clothes, and hardly make enough money in order to get by. These characters are sharply contrasted to a rich and successful international businesswoman (Hollywood star Bette Davis), and her husband (Hollywood star Joseph Cotton) who visit Rome once a year, where, each year, they win from Antonia and Peppino the game referred to as *scopone*. The former look clean, shiny, and world-wise, and have a lot of money and success.²⁶⁹ Of course, the latter are also no comedians, enhancing this contrast.

Some statements by Italian actors, critics, and filmmakers, suggest an inferiority complex in comparison to Hollywood cinema. The distinction between those two types of films described by Roberto Campari, for instance, suggests that Italian comedies are a ‘higher’ art, or more interesting, revealing the urge to ‘defend’ the latter.²⁷⁰ The following example is an expression of an inferiority complex as well. In an article published in 1953, Guido Aristarco, current leading film critic and film scholar, expresses his personal urge to distinguish Italian actresses from their American ‘counterparts’. He Italian actresses mainly found their way to fame through winning beauty pageants, and

le miss, in genere, non valgono niente: sono qualche volta belle, ma non

²⁶⁹ Towards the end of the film it turns out that ‘la signora’ and her husband/lover/boyfriend are not happy at all – in fact they are miserable – whereas Peppino and Antonia are actually rather satisfied with their lives.

²⁷⁰ Roberto Campari, ‘Commedia italiana e commedia americana’, in *Commedia all’italiana. Angolazioni controcampi*, ed. Riccardo Napolitano (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 1985), pp. 29-36.

sono intelligenti. (...) Non pensano affatto a studiare. Perciò anche se hanno un po' di talento, entro breve tempo si guastano.²⁷¹

Echoing Rowe's perspective on comedy, the gender binary used as a displacement of insecurities and anxieties is discussed in depth in the following chapters.

A literal example of the contrast between *italianità* and the idea(l) of America is shown in *Un americano a Roma* (Steno, 1954). The film starts with iconic images of Rome (Piazza del popolo, the Trevi fountain, the forum romanum, Piazza di Spagna, etc.), mandolin music, and a voice that says:

Questa è una storia che in un certo senso comincia con Cristoforo Colombo, perché Colombo fu il primo italiano che sognò di andare in America. Fu il primo per il quale l'America rappresentò una vera idea fissa. Si può senz'altro affermare che forse egli ci nacque, con una vera e propria voglia d'America. Così come anche al giorno d'oggi moltissimi europei nascono con la voglia d'America. Voglia che si manifesta sotto svariate forme.

At this point, we see Italian boys dressed up as native Americans chasing each other in a local park, people asking for American food in an Italian restaurant, where the waiter looks appalled, and loudly chewing caramel sweets at the local cinema, which is presented as copying 'American behaviour', while fellow cinemagoers look irritated. Then, the narrator refers to 'una famosa diva di Hollywood' who made popular a particular kind of dress that accentuates women's curves. After these images, the voice continues: 'Chi di noi abitanti della vecchia Europa non sogna di andare in America? L'America, con le sue

²⁷¹ Guido Aristarco, 'Lo scandalo delle curve', in *Cinema nuovo*, II, no 6, 1 March, 1953. I get back to the issue of gender later on.

meraviglie (...) Là dove tutti gli americani sognano di andare in Europa, a Roma.’

The b-roll accompanying these remarks is a sea of skyscrapers and cars, endless rows of metal buildings, sharply contrasted to the earlier images of Rome and its inhabitants.

The narrator mentions that there is only one American living in Rome, who dreams of going to America: Nando Moriconi (Alberto Sordi). He lives in a small house in Trastevere, with a room filled with American objects – posters of bodybuilders, actresses, comic books about the Wild West, baseball gloves and a bat, etc. However, while Nando tries to come closer to the American culture, by dressing and walking in a certain way, and eating what he considers typical American food, it is exactly this archetypal apartment in Trastevere and his Roman interpretation of everything ‘American’, secretly eating his pasta with *gusto*, that accentuates the contrast between his Roman life and the ‘American’ culture. Consequentially, in *Un americano a Roma*, ‘America’ seems distant, implying a proximity to Italian culture.

The scene in which Nando eats his pasta is one of the most recurrent images of Italian post-war cinema. To this day, it is found on posters and in calendars in tourist stands, and on the walls of restaurants around Italy and in Italian restaurants all over the world. This illustrates the significance of this film for the perception of ‘Italian culture’ in contemporary society, both in Italy and abroad – and reinforces two of the five *commedia all’italiana* tropes; pasta (food), and Roman culture.

Even though the term *commedia all’italiana* suggests some sort of domestic exclusivity (thinking back to Jordan’s observations on the principles of laughter), some of the films enjoyed international success. *I soliti ignoti* (Mario

Monicelli, 1958), *La grande guerra* (Mario Monicelli, 1959), *Matrimonio all'italiana* (Vittorio De Sica, 1964), and *La ragazza con la pistola* (Mario Monicelli, 1968) were all nominated for an Oscar for best foreign picture, with *Ieri, oggi, domani* (Vittorio De Sica, 1963) actually winning this prize in 1964. *I compagni* (Mario Monicelli, 1963), and *Casanova '70* (Mario Monicelli, 1965) were nominated for an Oscar for best screenplay, and *Divorzio all'italiana* (Pietro Germi, 1961) actually won. Pietro Germi was also nominated as best director, and Marcello Mastroianni for best actor, both for the same film.²⁷²

What, then, is *commedia all'italiana* (and I ask this without wanting to provide a definition in the answer)? These films altered the experience for cinema goers in Italy (and in some cases, abroad) who enjoyed comedy films, by facilitating a directional change of the Italian viewers' gaze from outwards, to inwards – creating what Bini (and others) describe as a 'public diary'; 'It is impossible not to be autobiographical in my profession. But in my opinion, it has to be a universal autobiography. (...) I always intended to make the viewer's autobiography,' stated Ettore Scola.²⁷³ Until the beginning of the 1950s,²⁷⁴ the focus of comedic films displayed in Italian cinemas had been either on American

²⁷² The film title *Divorce, American Style* (Bud Yorkin, 1967) was inspired by this film, as was the American television series *Love, American Style*. Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space* (2016), p. 39.

²⁷³ 'Het is onmogelijk niet autobiografisch te zijn, in mijn beroep. Maar wat mij betreft moet het wel een universele autobiografie zijn. De niet-uitzonderlijke feiten uit je eigen biografie oplepelen, daar zie ik niets in. Ik wilde altijd de autobiografie van de toeschouwer maken.' (My translation from Dutch)
<http://www.groene.nl/artikel/de-autobiografie-van-de-toeschouwer> [accessed 18 December 2017].

²⁷⁴ Mario Monicelli's *I soliti ignoti* (1958) is considered the first *commedia all'italiana*. But even in terms of temporality, I prefer not to pin the *commedia all'italiana* down to a specific beginning and end.

comedy actors, or on abstract Italian characters of the *telefoni bianchi* films. In the new type of comedies, viewers in Italy were subjected to an objectification of a much more concrete representation of themselves and their fellow Italians.

Offering a ‘simulacrum of the real’,²⁷⁵ and taking into account the theatrical characteristics of the *commedie all’italiana*, these films thus reveal the constructional and performative nature of *italianità*.²⁷⁶ This emphasises the fragility of this constructed identity, and a fetishising attitude towards the reality of Italy and Italians. Maurizio Grande describes the effect of ‘il travestimento comico’, similar to the comedic mask described above, as *denaturalizzando l’identità*: denaturalizing the reality that is Italy/*italianità* by emphasizing its performative, comical, and at times ridiculous, monstrous, side.²⁷⁷ And, as becomes clear from the analyses in the next chapters, on the other side, is the Other, the critical observer of this performance.

The protagonists, often presented, and described, as grotesque versions of the common Italian, the *italiano medio*, interpret the comical role of the fool (*ignorante*), or the *inetto*.²⁷⁸ As argued by Jacqueline Reich and by Marcello

²⁷⁵ Marcia Landy, *Stardom, Italian Style: Screen Performance and Personality in Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 131.

²⁷⁶ Grande observes that, ‘[l]a commedia all’italiana è questo: trattare con termini comici, divertenti, ironici, umoristici degli argomenti che sono invece drammatici. È questo che distingue la commedia all’italiana da tutte le altre commedie.’ Maurizio Grande, *La commedia all’italiana* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2003), p. 224.

²⁷⁷ This is confirmed by *commedia all’italiana* actors, such as Marcello Mastroianni, and Nino Manfredi. Marcello Mastroianni in Pietro Pintus, (red.), *Commedia all’italiana. Parlano i protagonisti*, cit., p. 140. Nino Manfredi in Pietro Pintus (red.), *Commedia all’italiana. Parlano i protagonisti* (Gangemi Editore, 1997), p. 137.

²⁷⁸ Cfr. Alan O’Leary, “‘In pieno fumetto’: Bertolucci, Terrorism and the commedia all’italiana”, in: Ruth Glynn, Giancarlo Lombardi and Alan O’Leary (ed.), *Terrorism Italian Style: Representations of Political*

Mastroianni himself, the characters Mastroianni portrays in *commedie all'italiana* – and in Italian ‘dramatic films’ – generally represent the anti-hero: the *inetto*.²⁷⁹

This male character type derives from the Jewish type *schlemiel*, and has a strong connection to the protagonist of Italo Svevo's *La coscienza di Zeno*.²⁸⁰

Reich and others, including Sergio Rigoletto in the context of Italian film, and Judith Butler from a general cultural constructivist perspective, argue that, similar to the notion of *italianità* as described above, the notion of masculinity is a constructed notion, and a performance;

modern, Western, bourgeois (...), shifting over time and varying with respect to culture. In Italy, the many social and political changes of the second half of the twentieth century have produced unsteady and conflicting masculine roles, which found expression in the figure of the *inetto* in

Violence in Contemporary Italian Cinema (London: Igrs Books, 2012), pp. 45-62, Nicoletta Marini-Maio recognises a link between this Italian prototype, the *uomo qualunque*, and the contemporary portrayals of Berlusconi in Italian films, documentaries, and television shows. Nicoletta Marini-Maio, ‘Before and After Silvio: A Corpus for Us All’, *Italian Political Cinema. Public Life, Imaginary, and Identity in Contemporary Italian Film*, ed. Giancarlo Lombardi and Christian Uva (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 45-56.

²⁷⁹ In *Il bell'Antonio* (Mauro Bolognini, 1960) the first film with Mastroianni after *La dolce vita*, he plays a young man who struggles with the burden of impotence. One year later, in *Divorzio all'italiana* (Pietro Germi, 1961) Mastroianni plays a ‘laido cornuto’, as he describes the character himself in *Marcello Mastroianni: mi ricordo, sì, io mi ricordo*.

²⁸⁰ This links this topic to another type of internal otherness: The Jewish other, specifically racialized during Mussolini's racial laws. In this study, I have not included this type, simply due to a necessity to focus on predominantly one type of non-white otherness. It would be fascinating to see how similar films dealt with this topic. Films that come to mind include two films by Ettore Scola, *Concorrenza sleale* (2001), and *1943-1997* (1997), and Vittorio De Sica's *Il giardino dei finzi contini*. Cfr. Millicent Marcus, *Italian Film in the Shadow of Auschwitz* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

Mastroianni's films.²⁸¹

The title of the film *Casanova 70* (Mario Monicelli, 1965) for instance, refers to the stereotype of the Italian macho *in assoluto*, Casanova. However, despite charming a lot of women, the 'Casanova' protagonist, Andrea Rossi-Colombotti (Marcello Mastroianni), is unable to perform sexually, unless he is in life-threatening danger. This is the cause of many comic situations, and the plot mocks the myth of the Italian virile macho man by presenting the protagonist as a grotesque version of a Casanova, a man constantly seeking eroticism, who is nevertheless unable to practice his Casanova skills under typical circumstances. This makes him an *inetto*.

Indeed, the *commedie all'italiana* were in part responsible for deconstructing Mussolini's ideal of the 'uomo virile', celebrating the anti-hero, supporting the central argument of this thesis that the *commedie all'italiana* offer subtle critique of persisting ideologies.²⁸² *Inetto* is an appropriate word for the vast majority of protagonists in *commedie all'italiana*, because it presupposes a inability to deal with the environment; Edwards and Graulund's observation of the grotesque as 'a potential place of spatial internment that echoes the state of being confined within the physical limits of grotesque bodies', corresponds to a lack of awareness of spatial limits or societal changes.²⁸³ In the following chapters, this

²⁸¹ Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, p. xxxi. Sergio Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, London: Routledge, 1999).

²⁸² Cfr. Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

²⁸³ Marcia Landy calls the male protagonists of *commedie all'italiana* 'buffoons'. Marcia Landy, *Stardom, Italian Style: Screen Performance and Personality in Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

brings us to an understanding of how grotesque versions of ‘Italians’ are unable to deal with a postcolonial and post-fascist reality, at times still holding on to an archaic, colonial set of values.

As Comand states, ‘alla base delle commedie all’italiana [c’è] il nucleo problematico dell’identità sociale, il conflitto tra il singolo e il suo ingresso nell’arena pubblica, sia essa la collettività o l’autorità, che pure è sempre vista come cerbera e vessatoria’.²⁸⁴ Bini argues that the *commedie* are related to the *boom economico* through the fact that the newly developing society revealed a ‘lack of a paternal law sustaining the social pact’.²⁸⁵ Through this tension between private life and public life, the *commedia all’italiana* films discuss both the Italian society as a whole, and the limitations it imposes on individual ‘standard’ Italians – reminding us of Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization and its discontents*. The societal problems addressed can be as concrete as the disadvantages of too much traffic on Roman streets in *Made in Italy* (Nanni Loy, 1965) in a scene with Anna Magnani as the protagonist fails to enjoy her only day off work by going to her favorite café, because she is unable to cross the street.²⁸⁶ The films can also discuss the

2008), p. 146.

²⁸⁴ Mariapia Comand, *Commedia all’italiana*, p. 9. Gianni Canova agrees that at least the plots of *commedie all’italiana* made between 1965-69 contain ‘uno scarto fra l’immagine pubblica e la sfera privata, [l’] iato che inevitabilmente le disgiunge e le separa.’ Gianni Canova, ‘La commedia all’italiana: l’“invenzione” della borghesia’, in *Storia del cinema italiano, 1965-1969* ed. Gianni Canova (Venice, Rome: Marsilio, Edizioni di Bianco & Nero, 2002), pp. 111-129 (p. 111). Canova describes the *commedia all’italiana* as a genre, which I disagree with.

²⁸⁵ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 6.

²⁸⁶ Underlying this straight-forward problem hides a deeper reality: that of a rapidly changing Italy during the years of the *boom economico*, the economic miracle, and, with that, the sudden rise of consumerism and modernity.

inequalities between the rich and the poor, and the notion of entitlement, as is the case in another episode of the same film: a very rich man in a private yacht enjoys some fishing with his young female lover. A group of fishermen passes them, and they seem exhausted, and economically in much less prosperous living conditions. ‘A chi tanto e a chi niente’, the rich man concludes, satisfied.

On the other hand, and this echoes the tension discussed above when referring to the kind of humour that is used, the *commedie all’italiana* have a celebratory approach towards the notion of *italianità*. For instance, many scholars consider *Ieri, oggi, domani* (Vittorio De Sica, 1963) a celebration of Naples and its inhabitants.²⁸⁷ Post Second World War Italy had a strong communist base, with the *Partito comunista italiano* (PCI) as the second largest Italian political party until around the last decade of the twentieth century.²⁸⁸ Hollywood represented the opposite of this ideology. The PCI used ‘culture and intellectuality as important themes, and as part of the identity of the party’.²⁸⁹ As a consequence, many left-wing artists and film directors felt inspired and supported, financially and artistically, to express themselves politically through their works. In the mid-1950s ‘a cross between Marshallian citizenship and American liberalism dominated the West, less through its internal evolution than through the fortunes of war’.²⁹⁰ Offering an Italian cinematographic alternative, and celebrating

²⁸⁷ Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover*, p. X

²⁸⁸ Stephen Gundle and Simon Parker, *The New Italian Republic: From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to Berlusconi* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 1.

²⁸⁹ Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, p. 214. In his turn, Gundle cites Michael Mann, “Ruling Class Strategies and Citizenship,” in *States, War, Capitalism*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989. Cfr. Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Federico Fellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 120.

²⁹⁰ Stephen Gundle, *Between Hollywood and Moscow*, p. 214. In his turn, Gundle cites Michael Mann,

everyday *italianità* in a comic yet affectionate manner, becomes all the more meaningful from this perspective: it could contain a political component as well.

Ettore Scola often stated in interviews that his intention had always been to concentrate in his films not on the exceptional people who played a conspicuous part in history, but rather on ‘la piccola gente’.²⁹¹ This implies a focus on the underdog, which can refer to class, constructions of race, gender, etc. ‘[As a genre] opposed to all forms of high art and literature’, Bakhtin’s notion of ‘grotesque realism’ includes parody and ‘any other form of discourse which brings down to earth anything ineffable or authoritarian, a task achieved principally through mockery’.²⁹² The *commedia all’italiana* is indeed not only about ‘la piccola gente’, but also made by, and for them, as is illustrated by the celebratory aspect of the films. To the list of binary oppositions, such as genre<auteur, Black<white, and comedy<drama, we can therefore add the notions of ‘high audience’ and ‘low audience’ – the *commedie* are aimed at the latter.

The discrepancy between what is considered ‘good taste’ and what is not, is illustrated in the following. When *Brutti, sporchi, e cattivi* (Ettore Scola, 1976) premiered, it was generally not appreciated by Italian film scholars and critics, most of whom considered the film to be ‘cynical’, ‘racist’ and/or ‘vulgar’ (as

‘Ruling Class Strategies and Citizenship’, in *States, War, Capitalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 206.

²⁹¹ ‘Nomino a protagonista la piccola gente che non ha partecipato a nessuna decisione storica. [...] E questo continuo mettere in contatto la Storia con personaggi piccoli e non protagonisti della storia, credo che – per la parte che riguarda i personaggi – sia proprio neorealistico.’ Scola in Vito Zaggarro (ed.), *Trevico - Cinecittà. L’avventuroso viaggio di Ettore Scola* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 2002), p. 29.

²⁹² Sue Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 155.

discussed above as well, referring to Bini).²⁹³ The protagonists of the film are a family living in a Roman *baracca*. As the title suggests, the life of the family is not comfortable; they have no privacy, no money, and no future prospects. Till this day, there is no consensus about whether the film can be considered a *commedia all'italiana*.²⁹⁴ However, all elements associated with the *commedia all'italiana* are present in the film, since it deals with problems in the Italian

²⁹³ 'In [*Brutti, sporchi e cattivi*] [...] c'è forse qualcosa di eccessivo. Certo, la miseria non aiuta la virtù, però qui ci sono solo mostri, non si salva nessuno. [...] In questa sinfonia dell'orrore tutto è oltranza, brutalità, esasperazione. Non c'è sfumatura, ambiguità, mistero.' Aldo Tassone, *Parla il cinema italiano* (Milan: Il Formichiere, 1979), p. 297. '[*Brutti, sporchi e cattivi*] non fu molto capito, perché anche su giornali insospettiti fu tacciato di razzismo, mentre le mie intenzioni erano diverse', Cfr. Ettore Scola in Roberto Ellero, *Ettore Scola* (Rome: Il castoro, 1996) p. 132, Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style: The Golden Age of Italian Film Comedy* (New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 178. On the other hand, it had a huge success outside of Italy, being nominated for an Academy Award, and winning a Palme d'Or and a Golden Globe.

²⁹⁴ Bondanella argues that *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* is an illustration of his statement that some of Scola's 'complicated metacinematic comedies depart, in some respects, from the traditional *commedia all'italiana* (...)' Bondanella, 2002: 206. Tassone describes *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* as 'il film più irrecuperabile e indigesto della sua carriera', which does not sound like a comedy. Tassone, *Parla il cinema italiano*, p. 296. Giacobelli includes it in his exhaustive list of *commedie all'italiana*, but considers it a 'commedia minore', and suggests that it refers more to neorealism. Enrico, Giacobelli, *La commedia all'italiana* (Rome: Gremese Editore, 1990), pp. 75, 79 resp. He argues, moreover, that, in *Brutti, sporchi e cattivi* Scola 'supera (...) la commedia per eccesso', and considers *C'eravamo tanto amanti* his last 'authentic' *commedia all'italiana* (177). Napolitano includes the film in his exhaustive list of *commedie all'italiana*, but in this volume it remains unclear why this decision was made; Lorenzo Quaglietti opens up the discussion of the distinction between *commedie all'italiana* 'vere' and 'false' and mentions Scola as a key example of a director who wrote and directed both 'types' of comedies. Quaglietti, in *Commedia all'italiana. Angolazioni controcampi* (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 1985), ed. by Riccardo Napolitano, pp. 65-74, 390-91.

society through a portrayal in the style of the grotesque of Italian citizens.²⁹⁵

Adding personal taste to the analysis of a (grotesque) film, in my perspective, is not that relevant for an analysis. I consider the film a *commedia all'italiana*.

The time frame most scholars give for the *commedia all'italiana*, the years of the *boom economico*, 1950-1970, I find too restricted, and too convenient, since it coincides exactly with the specific historical period of the *boom economico*, neatly following what scholars consider the time frame of neorealism. Many of the films that were made after that specific epoch correspond with all *commedie all'italiana* characteristics. I illustrate this supposition with a short analysis of Ettore Scola's *Gente di Roma* (2003) – a film which contains all the elements of the *commedia all'italiana*. In the film, the people of Rome (and not its leaders) are the protagonists, and the plot points out the painful consequences of othering through a comical exaggeration of the stereotypical *inetto* who is unable to deal with the ever-changing Italian reality. *Gente di Roma* starts early in the morning in a kitchen where a woman is preparing coffee and lunch for her husband who is going to work, and ends 24 hours later, on Piazza Navona, with two men sitting silently next to each other on a bench. Between the first and the last scene, events in the daily life of a large number of Romans are shown. A bus that either transports them or passes them by, connects the different stories of the characters. The digitally recorded images are often shaky and are made with a hand-held camera, which gives the film a documentary style, referring both to the neorealist tendency to 'tell the truth' – 'realism' – and to the relatively new genre

²⁹⁵ Scola remarked that '[*Brutti, sporchi e cattivi*] non fu molto capito, perché anche su giornali insospettati fu tacciato di razzismo, mentre le mie intenzioni erano diverse'. Ettore Scola in *Ridendo e scherzando - Ritratto di un regista all'italiana* (Paola and Silvia Scola,, 95', 2015).

of the *mockumentary*.²⁹⁶

Native Romans behave indifferently towards the abuses of society, whereas these social inequalities are at least partly the consequence of a recent past. The people that were considered inferior others according to imperialist propaganda, now live everywhere in Rome, have jobs, families, and friends, but the ‘native Romans’ refuse to acknowledge this. This is shown through (occasionally slapstick) humour in the shape of grotesque portraits of Roman *ignoranti* who are unable to see that their environment has changed and they cannot longer behave in a superior manner towards the former others. All the elements typical of the *commedia all’italiana* as mentioned above are present in this film: it is presented as a comedy; the maker expresses a critical voice towards this society; and the film, set in Rome, is a portrayal of *italiani medi*. Moreover, the protagonists are famous comic actors, partly of the older generation of the *commedia all’italiana* – Stefania Sandrelli appears in a scene, and Alberto Sordi was supposed to have a role, but passed away before the filming started – and partly of the ‘new’ generation, such as Valerio Mastandrea and Sabrina Impacciatore. Finally, the film is made by one of the most well-known film directors of the *commedia all’italiana*, Ettore Scola.

Analysing scholarship on the topic, and adding comments on existing binaries, we could describe the *commedia all’italiana* as a group of films that have the *italiano medio* as their protagonist, interpreted by locally famous actors. It distinguishes itself from Hollywood comedies by focussing on the specifically Italian everyday life. The humour that is used can be described as grotesque, and

²⁹⁶ Cfr. Linde Luijnenburg, “The grotesque as a tool. Deconstructing the imperial narrative in two ‘commedie all’italiana’ by Ettore Scola”, in: *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2014), 43-54.

contains two core communicative emotions of universal human experience, laughter and crying. Since the viewer recognises her/himself in (certain characteristics of) the protagonists, *commedie* contain an autoreflective subtext; the concept of *italianità* is ridiculed and questioned through an exaggerated performance of its representation. The *commedia all'italiana* therefore objectifies (fetishises) the Italian self, simultaneously in a critical, and in a celebratory way. The grotesque element of the *commedie all'italiana*, enables the viewers to change perspective: they look at what is usually considered to be 'self', as 'other': the performative characteristics of *italianità* implies the need for an Other, the observer. Similar to the colonised subject, defined by many propaganda means during the imperial period as described in the previous chapter, the *italiano medio* is defined, and as such, we can speak of a denaturalisation of the very notion of *italianità* in the *commedia all'italiana*.

Postcolonial theorist and film scholar Rey Chow discusses the (by now, practically imperative) approach in ethnographic research that argues that, because ethnographic texts are per definition subjective, the researcher should always foreground their own subjectivity. Chow expands this to film studies ('film as ethnography') and asks not just "whose subjectivity are we reading?", but also, when we are dealing with a filmic text, whose subjectivity are we observing, in the broadest sense of the word?²⁹⁷ She proposes we pay close attention to the 'subjective origins' of the productions of those who were previously ethnologized, while they now subjectify themselves. The question then

²⁹⁷ Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), chapter 3.

becomes, 'how do they show themselves?'²⁹⁸

This question refers to the cinematic gaze ('who is looking at whom?'), and discusses the idea of looking and being looked at, which becomes all the more complicated in the case of the *commedia all'italiana*; *Italiani medi* are both the ones making the films, the subjects of the films, and predominantly its audience, while they are ethnologized by Hollywood (we have to think only of the tropes of the Latin Lover, the *mafioso*, and indeed, the *inetto* of the *commedie all'italiana* who made it in Hollywood). Moreover, since this study deals with the notion of the Black Other, do these character show themselves, and if so, in what way?

²⁹⁸ Cfr. Paul Bowman, *Reading Rey Chow. Visuality, Postcoloniality, Ethnicity, Sexuality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), pp. 107-8

3 “And on the other side, the bright look of innocence”: *Lo sceicco bianco* (and the problematic binary of genre and auteur)

Federico Fellini’s cinema is fixed in the collective identity of ‘Italy’, and could be considered the archive par excellence of a collective cinematographic memory of the imagined community of ‘Italy’.²⁹⁹ The mystifying stories about Fellini’s life and adventures turned him into a comparable kind of star to the actors described in the previous chapter.³⁰⁰ As such, he embodies the authority, the *arkhē*,³⁰¹ the

²⁹⁹ Gino Moliterno describes Fellini as ‘[t]he most nationally celebrated and internationally renowned of all Italian directors of the postwar period’, in his *The A to Z of Italian Cinema* (Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2009), p. 127. For a bibliography on Federico Fellini, see John C. Stubbs, *Federico Fellini. A Guide to References and Resources* (Boston: G.K.Hall & Co, 1978), pp. 141-311, and Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Federico Fellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 177-84. A more recent – far from exhaustive – bibliography can be found in Andrea Minuz, *Viaggio al termine dell’Italia. Fellini politico* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2012), pp. 231-35. Fellini’s films have also famously introduced new words to various languages, among which the English language – felliniesque, paparazzi, and *la dolce vita*. Cfr. Guido Aristarco, ‘*La Strada* and the Crisis of Neo-Realism’, *Film Culture*, 1.2 (1955), 30-31, Gian Piero Brunetta, ‘Federico Fellini’, *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico, 1945-1959* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1982), pp. 504-15.

³⁰⁰ For an illustration of Fellini’s fame in Italy, see, for instance, John Baxter, *Fellini. The Authorized Biography* (London: Fourth Estate, repr. 1993), p. 27, Gilbert Salachas, ‘Fellini’s Imagery from *Variety Lights* to *Juliet of the Spirits*, in *Federico Fellini. Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 205-19 (pp. 205-12).

³⁰¹ When discussing the notion of ‘archive’, Jacques Derrida observes that ‘[i]n a way, the term (...) refers (...) to the *arkhe* in the *physical, historical, or ontological* sense, which is to say to the originary, the first, the principal, the primitive, in short to the commencement. But even more, and *even earlier*, “archive” refers to the *arkhe* in the *nomological* sense, to the *arkhe* of the commandment. As is the case for the Latin *archivum* or *archium* (...), the meaning of “archive,” its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded. The citizens who thus held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law.’ Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, ‘Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression’, *Diacritics*,

one who dictated a film language, the fellinesque, which continues to dominate national and international film critics' and scholars' idioms.³⁰²

Having started his film career in Libya, one of Italy's former colonies, Fellini's cinematographic interest in the notion of *italianità*, together with the central place 'il mito felliniano' continues to occupy in the imaginary of 'Italian culture', and the years in which Fellini was active as a film director (1952-1990), are an invitation to analyse his films with a particular emphasis on representations of white *italianità*, Black Otherness, and (echoes of) Italian (colonial) history.³⁰³ Considering the focus of this research, two of his films in particular are of interest: *Lo sceicco bianco* (1952), and *Amarcord* (1973). Just as *Io la conoscevo*

Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 9-63; pp. 9-10.

³⁰² Or so it seems: as soon as a promising Italian film director appears on the horizon – Paolo Sorrentino comes to mind – their cinematic expression is immediately compared to the 'felliniano'. The list of artists who acknowledged Fellini's legacy in their own works is endless. Lina Wertmüller's *Pasqualino Settebellezze* (1976) refers to Fellini's work. Woody Allen's *Celebrity* (1998) is said to have been a contemporary remake of *La dolce vita*; *Stardust Memories* (1980) bears similarities to *8½*; *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) refers to *Le notti di Cabiria* (1957); and *Radio Days* (1987) refers to *Amarcord*. Giuseppe Tornatore's *Nuovo cinema paradiso* (1988) and *L'uomo delle stelle* (1996) celebrate Fellini. Sofia Coppola's critically acclaimed *Lost in Translation* (2003) features a scene from *La dolce vita*. Ettore Scola's last semi-documentary film, *Che strano chiamarsi Federico* (2013), describes the crucial relationship the director had with Fellini. Musicians such as Bob Dylan, and Fish, have listed Fellini as an inspiration, as well. The second season Aziz Ansari's celebrated series *Master of None* (Netflix, May, 2017) is set in Modena, and the second episode starts with a song called *La dolce vita* by Ryan Paris, reinforcing this notion as part of *italianità*. The academic interest in the link between Sorrentino and Fellini is mostly expressed in a large number of conference papers on the topic, during conferences on Italian film studies.

³⁰³ Fellini's project I am referring to is the unfinished *Gli ultimi Tuareg*, with the alternative title *I predoni del deserto*. Tullio Kezich, *Federico. Fellini, la vita e i film*, op.cit., pp. 72-73. I borrowed the notion of 'il mito felliniano' from Andrea Minuz, *Viaggio al termine dell'Italia. Fellini politico* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2012), p. 11.

bene, both films are included in the list of the hundred Italian films to be saved of 2008, and therefore, they are recently reconfirmed as part of the Italian cultural heritage.³⁰⁴ In both films, and in crucial scenes for the plot, characters visually and sonically presented as Black Others function as a blank slate onto which anxieties of not belonging are projected by *italiani medi*.

Though not given a(n understandable) voice by the filmmakers, the presence and the performances of these Black Others point out the grotesque nature of *italiani medi*'s silencing of, and ignorance towards, the former. Other films by Fellini in which Black Others occur, be it more marginally, include *Le notti di Cabiria* (1957), *La dolce vita* (1960), *Otto e mezzo* (1963), *Giulietta degli spiriti* (1965), *Satyricon* (1969), and *Roma* (1972).³⁰⁵ Marking the earliest and the most recent films of the corpus of Fellini films which such characters, and of the corpus of this study, *Lo sceicco bianco* and *Amarcord* offer a perspective on possible developments or changes in filmic representations of *italianità*, Otherness, Blackness, Orientalism, and imperialism, over the course of two decades.

Offering visual, textual, and sonic analyses, together with historical and theoretical contextualisations of *Lo sceicco bianco*, this chapter engages with the question of how the five *commedia all'italiana* tropes – Catholicism, prostitution,

³⁰⁴ Other films by Fellini that are included in this list, are *Luci della varietà* (1950), *I vitelloni* (1953), *La strada* (1954), *Le notti di Cabiria* (1957), *La dolce vita* (1960), and *Otto e mezzo* (1963).

³⁰⁵ Marguerite R. Waller offers an interesting perspective on *La dolce vita*'s portrayal of an African-American woman, in Frank Burke and Marguerite R. Waller (ed), *Federico Fellini. Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 5-7. Cfr. Shelleen Greene, 'Buffalo Soldiers on Film. Il soldato afroamericano nel cinema neorealista e postbellico italiano', in *L'Africa in Italia*, ed. Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2013), pp. 101-02.

food, *fare bella figura*, and *romanità* – appear in the film, and what this informs us about the concepts and their functionality in communicating (white) *italianità* and (Black) Otherness. In my analysis of the film, I thus focus particularly on the characters that represent the *italiano medio*, and its contrasted Black Other. The analysis of *Amarcord* in the conclusion of this thesis is partly based on a comparison between the two films.

As a consequence of the abovementioned, both the brand and the persona of Federico Fellini have steered scholars and critics into fully separating films directed by him from those of other directors, representing in the eyes of many a corpus of an exemplary *auteur*.³⁰⁶ Even publications by scholars of a newer generation position ‘Fellini’ in the *cinema d’auteur* category.³⁰⁷ Other studies focus on the paradoxical nature of the *auteurist* features of films directed by Fellini, since many binaries are deconstructed in these films, including

³⁰⁶ Cfr. Francois Truffaut, ‘Une certaine tendance du cinéma français’, 1954, in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter John Graham, Ginette Vincendeau (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). In Tulio Kezich’s words, Fellini was ‘un “guru” costretto dall’assedio quotidiano dei media costretto ad affrontare gli argomenti seri’ Tulio Kezich, *Federico. Fellini, la vita e i film* (Milan: Feltrinelli, repr. 2007), p. 9. Cfr. Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico, 1945-1959*, vol. 3 (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1982), p. 506, Frank Burke, ‘Fellini: Changing the Subject’, in *Perspectives on Federico Fellini*, ed. Peter Bondanella, Cristina Degli Espositi (New York: G.K. Hall, 1993), pp. 275-92. Offering an alternative, John C. Stubbs interprets Fellini’s movies ‘as something of a genre, called the Fellini films, not unlike genres we might call Hitchcock films, Welles films, or Oliver Stone films.’ In my opinion, this is but a semantic difference. John C. Stubbs, *Federico Fellini as Auteur: Seven Aspects of His Films* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, repr. 2015), p. xi.

³⁰⁷ Cfr. Andrea Minuz, *Dell’incantamento. Hitchcock, Bergman, Fellini e il motive dello sguardo* (S. Maria C.V., Ipermedium Libri, 2009), p. 127; Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender and Everyday Space* (2015), p. 5.

spectator/spectacle, insider/outsider, and even beginning/end.³⁰⁸ Even others problematize the very binary of auteur and genre film. I agree with Andrea Bini when he remarks that we should get rid of the opposition between artistic auteur film and a sort of “artisan” production of genre directors.³⁰⁹ To the list of binaries deconstructed by Fellini, we could indeed add the binary of *auteur*/genre (and this counts for films discussed in the following chapters as well). In fact, films directed by Fellini, particularly the earlier ones, embody precisely the ambivalence of the notions of both auteur film, and the *commedia all’italiana*.

Many of these films were, and are, considered comedies; Fellini famously put a sign on his camera during the making of *Otto e mezzo* (1963) that said ‘Remember that this is a comic film’.³¹⁰ As outlined in chapter two, simultaneously making a semi-autobiographical film, embodying *italianità* according to a transnational audience, and referring to its comical aspects, reflect the principle characteristics of the *commedia all’italiana* as argued by scholars, film makers, and critics. Furthermore, as a collaborator on Roberto Rossellini’s *Roma città aperta* (1945), Fellini created the character of Don Pietro (Aldo Fabrizi). The scene in which this priest hits a man’s head with a frying pan in

³⁰⁸ Marguerite R. Waller, ‘Introduction’, Frank Burke, ‘Federico Fellini:

Reality/Representation/Signification’, Helen Stoddart, ‘Subtle Wasted Traces: Fellini and the Circus’, all in *Federico Fellini. Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. in Frank Burke and Marguerite R. Waller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

³⁰⁹ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety and Psychopathology in Film: Comedy, Italian Style* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p. 203.

³¹⁰ Eugene Walter, “Dinner with Fellini”, *The Transatlantic Review*, 17 (1964), 47-50 (p. 49).

order to make it seem as though he is dying in front of German soldiers, is regarded as the foundational scene for the *commedia all'italiana*.³¹¹

The *commedia all'italiana* being considered a 'genre', which is contrasted to the notion of 'auteur film', this contradictory quality of descriptions of Fellini's works illustrates to a lesser extent the director's specificity and originality, underlining to a greater extent instead some disputable components of critical works on his cinema, and on the *commedia all'italiana*. Bini nuances this by arguing that *commedie all'italiana* were 'in close dialogue with the audience' and therefore capable 'of grasping its desires and anxieties in a way impossible for great directors such as Fellini, Visconti, Antonioni, and Pasolini', while 'Fellini is an exception among the great directors, since his early movies – (...) *Lo sceicco bianco*, *I vitelloni*, but also *Il bidone* – can be said to belong to the predecessors of *commedia all'italiana*', while his later films would become 'more surreal'.³¹²

Fullwood agrees:

There was also a gray area between Comedy, Italian Style and auteur cinema. Alberto Sordi, for example, starred in Fellini's *Lo sceicco bianco* and *I vitelloni* (1953) in the early 1950s, playing characters that developed many aspects of his later Comedy, Italian Style persona.

For the abovementioned reasons, however, I incorporate *Lo sceicco bianco* (Federico Fellini, 1952) in this study on *commedie all'italiana*, considering it, in fact, part of the particular 'worldview' these films offer its viewers, and not a 'predecessor'. Bini, in fact, argues something very similar, considering the *boom* to be the mythology already created in the Italian imaginary before it became a

³¹¹ Tullio Kezich, *Federico. Fellini, la vita e i film* (Milan: Feltrinelli, repr. 2007), pp. 81-82.

³¹² Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2016), pp. 5-6, n5.

reality, in *commedie all'italiana* of the 1950s.³¹³ In the last chapter of this thesis, I come back to *Amarcord* (1973), which I use as a guideline in order to discuss what was argued in previous chapters, and as a *coda*, since this film offers both traditional and more progressive perspectives on some of the main themes of this study.

I appreciate that, by discussing two of his films and regarding them as the starting point and the coda, or end, of the corpus of this research, I treat Fellini as a particular case as well. My intention is not to deny any specific qualities of his films – nor to confirm them. Taking into account Roland Barthes' displacement of the 'author-God's' authority over the decisive meaning of a (in this case, filmic) text, I simply recognise the problematic aspects of treating Fellini as having produced films that exceed 'genre' – a term that I find problematic in itself.³¹⁴ I am less interested in the concept of 'Fellini the author', and more in revealing structures that his two specific films reveal – be they of an intentional or 'accidental' (possibly, unconscious), and central or peripheral, nature. I therefore deliberately do not treat his films as 'Fellini films', but as examples of *commedie all'italiana*. Unavoidable references to their *auteurist* features, or to his reputation as an *auteur*, underline the somewhat elusive character of genre distinctions. Marguerite Waller's observation that characters in films directed by Fellini are 'as free as Fellini's spectators to begin seeing and/or signifying differently (or not) than they had a moment before', for instance, could be applied not just to the film discussed in this chapter, but to those analysed in the following chapters as

³¹³ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), pp. 73-106.

³¹⁴ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-48.

well.³¹⁵ Moreover, Catholicism and the Catholic Church are considered subjects that typically occur in Fellini's films, whereas in reality, it is a trope of Italian films of that time; particularly *commedie all'italiana* frequently discuss the Catholic Church and Catholicism, as illustrated elsewhere in this study.

Given the Italian historical context of the time, the title of *Lo sceicco bianco* suggests a play with the constructed opposition between whiteness and its difference: *sceicco* ('Oriental', not Italian, 'them') and *bianco* (Western, Italian, 'us'). Concentrating in particular on the importance of costume as a signifier for difference (masks, a characteristic element of the *commedia dell'arte* as discussed in the previous chapter) in two specific scenes, and on the typically cinematographic notion of framing as a metaphor for projecting in the Freudian sense, I argue below that, on a meta-level, the structure of the film carefully, and in some aspects even tentatively, brings to the fore postcolonial issues concerning notions of whiteness, *italianità*, and consequentially, difference, and Blackness.

The idea of the film initiated by Michelangelo Antonioni, written by Fellini, Tullio Pinelli, and Ennio Flaiano, and entirely shot in black and white – echoing the *fotoromanzi* which were published in black and white as well – *Lo sceicco bianco* starts with images of famous monuments of the Italian capital, shown during the opening credits, as though it were a tourist photo album.³¹⁶ In

³¹⁵ Marguerite Waller, 'Introduction', in *Federico Fellini. Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Burke and Marguerite R. Waller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), p. 7.

³¹⁶ For more on *Lo sceicco bianco*, see Federico Fellini, *Fare un film* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), pp. 48-53, Jacqueline Risset, 'The White Sheik: The Annunciation Made to Federico', in *Perspectives on Federico Fellini*, ed. Peter Bondanella and Cristina Degli Esposti (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), pp. 63-70, Gian Piero Brunetta, *Storia del cinema italiano. Dal neorealismo al miracolo economico, 1945-1959*, vol. 3

the opening scene, a couple from the countryside, Ivan Cavalli (Leopoldo Trieste) and his wife Wanda (Brunella Bovo) arrive in Rome for their honeymoon. The two have separate plans: Ivan has created a tight schedule for the couple, which includes meeting his family, and the pope, whereas Wanda intends to go and meet Fernando Rivoli (Alberto Sordi), a *fotoromanzo* actor known for his recurring role of *lo sceicco bianco*. She pretends to take a bath, while secretly leaving their hotel room to go and visit Rivoli's office. Instead of her idol, she finds the head writer of the *fotoromanzo*, who tricks her into travelling to Fregene beach, where a crew is working on the latest edition of the magazine. She meets Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco* there, hanging on a swing that seems to be attached to the sky. He convinces an overwhelmed Wanda to play the role of 'Fatma, the faithful slave' in the upcoming edition of the magazine.

The phenomenon of the *fotoromanzo* was an Italian invention that became immensely popular in the 1940s and 1950s. Peter Bondanella compares the *fotoromanzi* of that time, before the mass consumption of television programmes, to that of the phenomenon of television soap operas in the early 1990s, while Fellini describes them with disregard as 'cartoons': 'I don't mean the 'cartoons' as a journalistic expression, but as an attitude, as a fashion'.³¹⁷ Karen Pinkus points

(Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1982), pp. 508-09, Frank Burke, *Federico Fellini. Variety Lights to La dolce vita* (London: Columbus Books, 1984), pp. 13-20, John Baxter, *Fellini. The Authorized Biography* (London: Fourth Estate, repr. 1993), chapter 11, Tullio Kezich, *Federico. Fellini, la vita e i film* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002), pp. 118-28, Peter Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 79-89.

³¹⁷ Peter Bondanella, *The Cinema of Federico Fellini* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 80, Federico Fellini in *Federico Fellini. Essays in Criticism*, ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 9.

out the ‘cartoonish’ characteristics with which blackness is presented in Italian advertising and popular culture – which is how we can interpret characters in the particular *fotoromanzo* in the film as well; their Orientalist features are a precise representation of the actual characters in *fotoromanzi* at the time, and the effect they have on Wanda demonstrates how strongly popular culture affected its consumers.³¹⁸ The scene with Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco* hanging on a swing is an embodiment of Fellini’s preparational drawing of this scene, pointing out the ‘cartoonish’ characteristics of Wanda’s imaginary of *lo sceicco bianco* (20.8.21, images 9, 10).³¹⁹ The character of *lo sceicco bianco*, furthermore, is based on Rudolph Valentino’s cinematic Sheik performances.³²⁰ This underlines in a comical manner the highest level of stardom at the time, established through a worship of an exotic-erotic fantasy.³²¹ The reference to Valentino also illustrates

³¹⁸ Karen Pinkus, ‘Shades of Black in Advertising and Popular Culture’, in *Revisioning Italy. National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. Beverly Allen, Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 134-55 (p. 135), and note 1.

³¹⁹ Cfr. Pier Marco De Santi, *I disegni di Fellini* (Rome, Bari: Editori Laterza, 1982), illustration 8.

³²⁰ Rudolph Valentino (Rodolfo Alfonso Raffaello Pierre Filibert Guglielmi di Valentina d’Antonguella, 1895-1926), an Italian actor who became famous in Hollywood, was also known as ‘the Latin Lover’. His sudden death made him into an even bigger star, especially amongst female fans. He played a sheik character twice, once in *The Sheik* (George Melford, 1921), and later in *The Son of the Sheik* (George Fitzmaurice, 1926). Cfr. Alexander Walker, *Rudolph Valentino* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1976), Noel Botham, *Valentino: the Love God* (London: Everest, 1976), Michael Williams, *Film Stardom, Myth, and Classicism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 93-103 and pp. 174-201, Amy Lawrence, ‘Rudolph Valentino: Italian American’, in *Idols of Modernity: Movie Stars of the 1920s*, ed. Patrice Petro (New Brunswick, London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), pp. 87-107, Lisa Bode, ‘The Afterlives of Rudolph Valentino and Wallace Reid in the 1920s and 1930s’, in *Lasting Screen Stars. Images that Fade and Personas that Endure*, ed. Lucy Bolton, Julie Lobalzo Wright (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), pp. 159-72.

³²¹ Lisa Bode, ‘The Afterlives of Rudolph Valentino and Wallace Reid’, pp. 159-160. Cfr. Noel Botham, *Valentino: The Love God* (London: Everest, 1976).

the transmediality of *Lo sceicco bianco*'s intertexts, which we can see reflected in other films discussed in the following chapters as well, particularly *Riusciranno?*. Finally, similar to how in *Un americano a Roma* the protagonist's *italianità* accentuates his remoteness from Hollywood, the Italian characteristics of the *fotoromanzi*, combined with the Italian actor playing the *sceicco bianco* role, while embodying a reference to a Hollywood star, emphasise how remote Hollywood is, underlining the 'local' features of the Italian characters and settings in this film. Simultaneously, since Rudolph Valentino was stereotyped as a Latin Lover, his image refers to the 'ethnic' characteristics of the imaginary of Italians from a Hollywood perspective, and therefore to Italy's in-between status, 'denaturalizzando l'identità'.

Following, and adding to, the classical Marxist account of commodity fetishism, Sara Ahmed describes the transformation of fantasies into figures as follows:

[F]etishism involves the displacement of social relations of labour through the transformation of objects into figures. [...] Stranger fetishism is a fetishism of figures: *it invests the figure of the stranger with a life of its own insofar as it cuts 'the stranger' off from the histories of its determination.*³²²

In *Lo sceicco bianco*, costumes, skin tone, and the binary of black and white, function as the signs facilitating this transformation of objects into figures.

Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco* and Wanda/Fatma, dressed as a sheik and a harem girl respectively, sail off in a boat during their lunch break. He tries to kiss

³²² Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: embodied others in post-coloniality* (London: Routledge 2000), ebook, the author's italics.

her, and she refuses, but tentatively, saying to him, ‘non sono libera’, acknowledging however that she is confused about ‘who she is’. When he tells her a fairy-tale like story of how he was tricked into marrying the woman that is now his wife while loving someone else, Wanda/Fatma is ready to kiss him back, but they are ‘saved’ by the boom of the boat hitting Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco*’s head. When they arrive back at the shore, Fernando’s furious wife is present on set. In an even stronger Roman accent, he denies having feelings for Wanda/Fatma, revealing that his fairy tale stories about his unfortunate marriage were a lie. Fernando leaves the set on the back of his wife’s scooter, dressed in a suit and tie, leaving nothing left of the body onto which Wanda/Fatma’s fantasy of the character of the *sceicco bianco* could be projected.

Wanda/Fatma tells Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco* that she is confused about ‘who she is’ while being dressed as a harem girl. I therefore agree with Virginia Picchiotti who, analysing Fellini’s ‘problematization’ of the construct of femininity in *Lo sceicco bianco*, argues that in the case of Wanda/Fatma, ‘identity is constructed through dress, and dress in turn affects social interaction.’ Moreover, Wanda indeed does not perform her wifely tasks at home, just as she does not perform her ‘duties’ as a harem girl; her two ‘identities’ depend merely on her physical appearance.’³²³

Lo sceicco bianco illustrates indeed that there are merely two types of performances of ‘woman’ available to Wanda: that of the sexualised, and fictional, seductress Fatma, a narrative stemming from the Orientalizing

³²³ Virginia Picchiotti, ‘When in Rome Do As the Romans Do? Federico Fellini’s Problematization of Femininity (*The White Sheik*)’ in *Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Burke and Marguerite R Waller (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 92-106 (p. 97).

fotoromanzi, which would ‘out’ her from her community, on the one hand. On the other hand, there is the imaginary of the faithful wife Wanda, stemming from the narrative produced by the ‘Italian’ Catholic Church, which would make her belong.³²⁴ Both roles, therefore, become abstract notions – objects turned into figures. I agree with Picchietti that Wanda jumps back and forth between the roles without anchoring herself in either one of the two, creating a commentary on these limited options of ‘femininity’.

In the case of the Italian cinema, publications on the constructed nature of the notion of gender are predominantly studies presented as works on the concepts of either masculinity, or femininity.³²⁵ Yet one abstract imaginary does not exist without its antipode – which is also generally the assumption in these publications. In *Lo sceicco bianco*, similar to Wanda/Fatma’s role changes, Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco*, dressed as a sheik, fails to perform his ‘duties’ as a virile sheik as well, be they of a different kind – and plausibly of a more intentional nature. It is the social construct of masculinity that induces him to try

³²⁴ Cfr. Jeff Pratt, ‘Catholic Culture’, in *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*, ed. David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 129-43 (pp. 133-34).

³²⁵ See, among others, Catherine O’Rawe and Jacqueline Reich, *Divi. La mascolinità nel cinema italiano* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2015), Sergio Rigoletto, *Masculinity and Italian Cinema: Sexual Politics, Social Conflict and Male Crisis in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima. Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover. Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), Virginia Picchietti, ‘When in Rome Do As the Romans Do? Federico Fellini’s Problematization of Femininity (*The White Sheik*)’ in *Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Burke and Marguerite R Waller (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 92-106, Alan O’Leary, ‘Mascolinità e bianchezza nel cinepanettone’, in *Il colore della nazione*, ed. Gaia Giuliani (Le Monnier, 2015), pp. 76-91. However, the title of Fullwood’s study on gender in the *commedia all’italiana*, for instance, already refers to gender as a whole.

and convince Wanda/Fatma to kiss him when he is dressed as the Sheik, just as much as he is to behave according to the paradigm of ‘the husband’, when his wife appears and he is neatly dressed in a suit and tie. Catherine O’Rawe and Jacqueline Reich assert that, from an anthropological perspective, ‘Italian masculinity’ is to be defined in the public sphere, in which they recognise ‘il banco di prova della mascolinità attraverso il potere sessuale (spargere il seme), e poi mantenendo e proteggendo la famiglia, il suo nome e il suo onore’.³²⁶ This stereotypical imagery of Italian *mascolinità*, which invites reflection on, and nuances of, matters of class, age, ethnicity, etcetera, fits the portrayal of Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco*, since he, as a grotesque version of the *italiano medio*, switches between these two roles. He demonstrates no real commitment to either one of these types either, since he and Wanda/Fatma do not kiss, while his wife is angry at him for the possibility that they might have.

Offering a more complicated perspective on the notion of masculinity, Bini’s study is ‘based on the idea that *commedia all’italiana* is characterized by the incurable distress of its protagonists, so that a sort of psychoanalysis and diagnosis of their various psychopathologies becomes crucial’.³²⁷ He illustrates that through pointing out the ‘lack of a paternal law sustaining the social pact’ in films such as *Accadde al commissariato* (Giorgio Simonelli, 1954), *Il vigile* (Zampa, 1960), and *Una vita difficile* (Dino Risi, 1961) which illustrate the consequential anxiety surrounding male protagonists who become neurotic. This seems to be the case for all protagonists of the corpus of this study, including *lo sceicco bianco*, Wanda, and Ivan.

³²⁶ Cfr. Catherine O’Rawe and Jacqueline Reich.

³²⁷ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 7.

The two available roles of both characters refer to sexual behaviour as the underlying quality that mark them as either one or the other. The story framed within the plot, that of the *fotoromanzo*, confirms the significance of dress (masks) as a signifier of Orientalist and erotic projections as well, and stresses the grotesque quality of the cartoon plot and its characters. The first long shot we see of the scenery (0.33.34) is a close-up of an eroticized woman belly dancing, highlighting the sensual atmosphere (image 11). In the *fotoromanzo* plot, Oscar the Cruel Sheik arrives at the beach with his ‘demonic army’ in his ‘Moorish ships, well known on the African coast’ (image 12, 13). He and the white Sheik meet on the shore: an encounter described as one ‘between Good and Bad’ (image 14). In the scene that is about to be shot, Oscar and his army will rape the women who belong to the White Sheik’s harem (image 15, 16).

In his study on the social construct of whiteness, Richard Dyer notes that in Western art and language, with some minor local variations, ‘white = good and black = bad.’³²⁸ In the *fotoromanzo*, Oscar is darker in both skin tone and dress than *lo sceicco bianco*, and he has ‘Moorish ships’, and comes from ‘Africa’, reaffirming this opposition between B/black and white, and insider/outsider.³²⁹ If we compare the frames in which Oscar and the *sceicco bianco* appear together (image 14), and apart (image 12, 13, 17) their difference is indeed cartoonishly obvious. While Oscar looks grim, and his darkness is accentuated through shadow on his face, and his teeth contrasting his skin (see particularly image 13), the

³²⁸ Richard Dyer, *White* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 58.

³²⁹ See the introduction of this thesis, p. 1, note 3, for the usage of capitals when describing white and Black.

Cfr. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/opinion/the-case-for-black-with-a-capital-b.html?_r=0>.

sceicco bianco is positioned much higher in the frames, while he laughs, and his whiteness is accentuated through lighting (images 14, 17). As Dyer notes,

[w]hat is absent from white is any *thing*; in other words, material reality.

Cleanliness is the absence of dirt, spirituality the absence of flesh, virtue the absence of sin, chastity the absence of sex and so on'.³³⁰

By raping the women, Oscar would infect them physically with his badness/Blackness. The whiteness of the harem women's skin is accentuated through lighting and composition as shown in image 15, and 16. Moreover, their passiveness is underlined by the absence of any material reality in their eyes, their seeming cleanliness, and their spiritual look up to the sky when in danger. The fear of the Black man raping white Italian women was a trope during fascism, as is confirmed for instance in a propaganda manifest of 1944 (image 18).³³¹

What is remarkable in the context of academic literature on the topic, and for a film of this specific period dealing with these notions, is that, simply through analysing the structure of the plot, one cannot but acknowledge that situations and attitudes which invite viewers to laugh materialise in the subjects who fetishize – not in the ones who are imperial objects of fetishism. The scenes of the *fotoromanzo* set are accompanied by a kind of circus music, underlining the comical absurdity of it all. The 'director' of the *fotoromanzo* 'scenes', moreover, bosses everybody around, but fails to control the situation, resulting in more slapstick humour. The Italian subjects are depicted as grotesquely in need of the

³³⁰ Richard Dyer, *White* (1997), p. 75.

³³¹ Riccardo Bonavita, Gianluca Gabrielli, Rosella Ropa (ed.), *L'offesa della razza. Razzismo e antisemitismo dell'Italia fascista* (Bologna: Patron Editore, 2005), p. 91.

presence of outsiders that they can dominate: they depend on the presence of an Other in Lacan's usage of the word.

The first manifestation of Wanda's tendency to stranger fetishism occurs earlier in the film. At the office of the *fotoromanzo*, she has a conversation with its editor-in-chief (Fanny Marchiò) in which Wanda passionately discusses her love for the *sceicco bianco*, and reveals that 'her real life begins at night', when she has time for herself to read – emphasising the importance of her Orientalist fantasy for her personal mental health. During their conversation, a young man arrives in the office. Dressed in 'oriental attire' – wide pants, a piece of cloth which functions as a belt, a white blouse with wide sleeves, a waistcoat, large golden earrings and a large golden bracelet – he has a strong Roman accent. Wanda is perplexed by this character to a degree that she gets up from her seat and stares at the young man while opening her mouth with astonishment. This moment is further emphasised in three medium shots and long takes which position her on the right side of the frame, catching all the light in her white dress (13.36, image 19). Taking into account the general association of whiteness with 'innocence', her white dress, and the light falling onto Wanda's face which makes her seem paler, emphasize her 'innocence', and contrast her to the 'exotic' young man, who has in fact a darker skin tone.

The young man's clothes signify the notion of 'stranger', whereas his accent refers to the metropole of the imagined community of Wanda's nation state – which is emphasised in the opening shots of the film, focussing on Rome's famous monuments. The absurdity of the binary thinking that formed part of the imperial narrative of the hegemonic power as discussed in chapter one – Italian, Roman, White – and the colonised – non-Italian, 'Oriental', Black? – is

emphasised cinematographically through Wanda's perplexity, portrayed in a grotesque manner, and through the physical and behavioural contrasts between her and the man she observes. This exotic Roman man does not fit in the binary worldview Wanda has been offered by the Italian imperial narrative, for in his appearance, these two binary oppositions are combined into one figure, as though the man were a living paradox. Wanda's perplexity, furthermore, confirms Bergson's theory of the 'mechanical elasticity' of the subjects of our laughter; she is unable to adjust (in time) to the reality of a world in which the imperial narrative is officially ignored, but never denied, whereas the two imperial notions of self and other are now growing closer to one another – at least according to renewed geopolitical realities.³³² Shelleen Greene demonstrates, for instance, that already in the immediate post-bellum, in four years of Italian film, there are more representations of African-American soldiers who fought against the Germans during the Second World War than in the history of American cinema, illustrating the presence of Black subjects in an explicitly Italian group of films that were made earlier than *Lo sceicco bianco*, forming part of the Italian cultural heritage. It is, indeed, not the 'negro', as Bergson argues elsewhere in his essay, but Wanda, who is fetishized in Ahmed's terms, who is portrayed in a cartoonish manner, since she is the object of our laughter, and turned into the viewer's focal point.

³³² Shelleen Greene, 'Buffalo Soldiers on Film. Il soldato afroamericano nel cinema neorealista e postbellico italiano', in *L'Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano*, ed. Leonardo De Franceschi (Rome: Aracne, 2013), pp. 93-123.

In the aforementioned scene, there is a constant reference to the notion of framing,³³³ which lies at the very core of the medium of film. It is also the first step of fetishizing (Ahmed), Orientalism (Said), dependency on an Other (Lacan), stereotyping (Dyer), objectifying, and differentiating. The film's meta-critique exists of the fact that framing, often facilitated through costume, becomes the tool for the protagonists to differentiate between characters and concepts, whereas viewers are invited to register its theatricality and arbitrariness – 'invitandoci a riflettere'.

When the young man starts to speak, he stands next to a framed bust of a Roman man (13.38, image 20). The two faces are positioned at the same height, seen from the same angle, and have very similar facial features. The bust, however, is placed on a pedestal, and framed by the relief of the wall behind it, inside of the larger film frame, while the young man is not. This particular mise-en-scène illustrates the arbitrariness of who/what is framed, and who/what is not. Another shot illustrates as well the unjustifiability of distinctions by pointing out the similarities between two differentiated characters. Immediately after the appearance of the exotic Roman man, Wanda admires a photo of 'her' *sceicco bianco* inside a photo frame, while the young man is positioned in the background, echoing *lo sceicco bianco*'s pose (14.08, image 21). Wanda ignores the young man in flesh and blood standing right behind her, concentrating instead on a framed photographed character.³³⁴

³³³ Cfr. Frank Burke, 'Film about Film and Modernist Self-Reflexivity: *The Temptations of Dr. Antonio*', Frank Burke, *Fellini's Films* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), pp. 113-23 (p. 113).

³³⁴ She distinguishes between these two people on the basis of yet another constructed arbitrary hierarchical order: that of the Rudolph Valentino-level star system (see chapter two). For more on the star system, see Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004).

When Ivan, left behind in his hotel, is woken up by the sound of loud knocking on his door, he jumps out of his bed, and realises that his feet are wet, since Wanda left the bathwater running. Deeply confused, he opens the door to an angry priest, who starts shouting at him in an incomprehensible language, pointing to the water that has filled the hotel corridor as well. Ivan, barely registering the presence of the priest, continuously repeats the phrase ‘dov’è la mia signora?’, while looking up to the sky. The priest, attempting to communicate with Ivan, steps into the room, and taps him on the shoulder. When the hotel’s cleaner arrives and starts raising her voice to Ivan as well, the room is in complete chaos, and the steam appearing out of the bathroom, making objects and characters in the room hazy, the unsteady camera angle, and the loud shouting of the three characters, all add a cinematographic effect to this chaotic situation.

As in the *fotoromanzo* scenes, it is the priest’s clothes that display his functionality in the societal hierarchy, identifying him as part of the Italian hegemonic power of the Catholic Church. However, he has a much darker skin tone than all other characters in the film, and he speaks an incomprehensible language. Given that this character would have characteristics that mark him as different from the Italians (language, skin tone) he seems an obvious target for projections of the imaginary of a Black Other. In films which are contemporaries of *Lo sceicco bianco*, characters with a darker skin tone are often portrayed as inferior to the *italiano medio* protagonists. These characters confirm a stereotype created during the imperial period, as described above: Making loud music, dancing wildly, visiting night bars, they are often situated in the background of a scene with a whiter, *italiano medio*, protagonist. They hardly, or do not, speak (Italian), occasionally sing, or play an instrument: they are there to entertain.

Examples include *Proibito rubare* (Luigi Comencini, 1948), *Persiane chiuse* (Luigi Comencini, 1951), *Amori di mezzo secolo* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1954), and *Tutti a casa* (Luigi Comencini, 1960).

As opposed to these lazy portrayals of the aforementioned characters, and resisting the notion of ‘Blackness as bad’ as described by Dyer, the priest in *Lo sceicco bianco* literally walks through his (cartoon) frame, the door frame, entering Ivan’s hotel room without being invited in, repudiating a role in the background, and continuing to look for interaction with Ivan. It is exactly the priest who wakes Ivan up from a dream, both literally and figuratively, bringing him back to the reality of the situation.

Frantz Fanon argues, not dissimilar to Ashcroft et. al. as discussed above, that colonised people position themselves in relation to ‘the civilizing language; i.e., the metropolitan culture’, in *Lo sceicco bianco* represented by the Italian language, and Rome, a culture Ivan aspires to belong to: he is desperately attempting to obtain a career in the Vatican. Fanon continues, [t]he more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets’, and

[t]he more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become.³³⁵

This is exactly what does not happen with the priest in *Lo sceicco bianco*: by expressing himself through his own language, yet at the same time making himself perfectly clear – at least, to the viewer of the film – the character of the priest offers an alternative narrative to the one described by Fanon. Similar to the character in *Io la conoscevo bene*, in doing so, the priest thus emphasises the

³³⁵ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 2-3.

socio-cultural limitations of regarding spoken (Italian) language as the only mode of communication.³³⁶

The priest furthermore understands the circumstances before anybody else does. Appearing suddenly, without an introduction, in the hazy atmosphere that is Ivan's hotel room, his presence refers to the lack of acknowledgement of the Italian colonial past, since he embodies that chapter of Italian history in which hierarchies based on skin colour were created and exploited – and of which he will most certainly be aware. Ivan ignoring the priest parallels the Italian political reality of the 1950s, which existed publicly of an ignorance of the Italian imperial enterprises, and he reverberates Bergson's 'mechanical elasticity' even more so than Wanda does in the abovementioned scene.³³⁷

While Wanda is gone, Ivan tries to entertain his family members, to whom he tells that Wanda is ill and has to stay in bed. In the middle of an opera performance, Ivan tells his uncle he will be right back, and runs to the police office, where he attempts to report a missing person without revealing his identity, in order to protect his name. The police take him for a madman, and after they

³³⁶ This underlines the unimedial characteristics of cinema as described in previous chapters – films have the capacity to create a unified language, existing of spoken and/or written words, music, voices, background sounds, silences, and the visual (frames, movement, spaces. James Monaco, *How to Read A Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond Art, Technology, Language, History, Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, repr. 2009).

³³⁷ The language spoken by the priest appears to be a fictive language, spoken by an Italian dubber, as the voice and pronunciation of the words indicate an Italian tongue. On the one hand, this accentuates again Ivan's ignorance; this is probably how Ivan would interpret the in his eyes cartoonish character: the plot is presented from an *italiano medio* perspective. On the other hand, instead of hiring a dubber who could speak an existing language from an African country, the Italian dubber is given the part, keeping the hegemonic power in place by advantaging an Italian speaker.

lock him up in their office to go and find a doctor, he manages to escape through the backdoor. That evening, desperately wandering around the city, he meets two women – one of them asks him suggestively to bring him home. They walk off together, their arms wrapped around one another.

Wanda, that same evening, will be taken for a madwoman as well. After she leaves the *fotoromanzo* crew, still dressed as Fatma, she meets a man, who brings her back to her hotel. Suggesting she provoked him by what she is wearing, and calling her a *baiadera*, the man tries to sleep with her, but she wholeheartedly refuses, and he drives off. Standing in front of the hotel, she cannot bring herself to go inside. She walks to the Tiber, and throws herself in the water in the hope to drown. The water of the river, however, reaches only to her ankles. A man notices her, and drags her out of the Tiber.

The next morning, Ivan, on the verge of telling his family everything, receives a phone call from a psychiatric hospital: Wanda has spent the night there, and Ivan can come and pick her up. He tells his family to meet him at Piazza San Pietro, goes to the institution, looks appalled by Wanda's revealing 'harem clothes', and demands her to change, without explaining anything else to her. Together, they arrive just in time to meet Ivan's family, and the pope, who will bless the newlyweds – a common practice at the time. While walking in the direction of the San Pietro, Wanda promises Ivan that she is still 'innocent and pure', and tells him that he is her *sceicco bianco*.

The elements of the plot and of Ivan and Wanda's physical environment (the prefilmic space, Fullwood) that seem significant for the subjective experience of these characters, are emphasized through lighting, camera angles, sound, and timing. The viewer, therefore, experiences the film through the eyes of the two

protagonists, a technique referred to in film studies as subjective camera, or POV (point of view shot).³³⁸

Often in the film, when Wanda or Ivan experience a particular strong feeling or emotion, the overpowering force of the Catholic Church is the instigator. When Ivan picks up Wanda at the madhouse, he tells her decidedly to get dressed and make herself ‘appropriate’ for their visit to the pope. During this speech, Ivan is shown from a frog-eye perspective, with behind him, even higher than – but very close to – his face, a crucifixion (1.21.28, image 22). This suggests that Catholicism is behind and above Ivan, that its power reinforces him, and that being with Wanda will allow him to function in his experience of the society.

Wanda, too, feels the Church’s constant presence in her life, yet it manifests itself in different forms: from her perspective, the Church often signals a warning, a threat, and a sense of shame, and she is more inclined to resist the Church’s demands. When running away from the hotel to go and meet ‘her sheik’, there is one isolated sound of loud church bells in the background, reminding her that what she is about to do is morally unjust according to the Church’s philosophy. Wanda walks on nevertheless. When she refuses to kiss Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco*, she explains to him that ‘ci sono cose più grandi, più forti di noi’, referring to her marriage, considered a sacred institution by the Catholic Church.³³⁹ However, after Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco* has provided her with an

³³⁸ Cfr. David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, *Film Art. An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, repr. 2013), p. 90.

³³⁹ Cfr. Jeff Pratt, “Catholic Culture”, in David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (ed.), *Italian Cultural Studies, an Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 129-43 (p. 133).

alternative fairy tale to the concept of marriage, she ignores the Catholic dogma, and is ready to give in to him. Right before she throws herself in the Tiber, Wanda looks up, and sees the angels in stone of the *Ponte Sant'Angelo*. The camera angle testifies to the importance of these angels by showing them in frog-eye perspective while a very bright light from behind accentuates their silhouettes (1.13.14, image 23). Since we experience the film POV, here as well, the angels generate a sense of fear, shame, and loss in Wanda, as she associates the angels with the Catholic Church and her inability (failure) to obey. Once again, Wanda decides to jump despite their presence.

In the last scene on *Piazza San Pietro*, however, the family in general, and Wanda in particular, are accepted into the world of normality: they perform their roles as Christians, *italiani medi* – white, and not ‘mad’ in the Foucauldian sense (see below). When Wanda, no longer dressed as a ‘*baiadera*’, tells Ivan that she is still pure and innocent, she looks up in the direction of the *Basilica di San Pietro*, closes her eyes, smiles, and while tears roll over her cheeks, her face catches the light, making her look paler than she is. There is a strong similarity between this shot and many Italian paintings of Mary’s Immaculate Conception (images 24, 25). The Virgin Mary is ‘the supreme exemplar of [...] feminine whiteness’³⁴⁰ – Ivan’s looking up to the sky, and asking for ‘la mia signora’ in the scene where he cannot find Wanda in the hotel bathtub, refers to this cult of the Virgin Mary as well. The frame of Wanda’s Immaculate Conception confirms Wanda’s ‘innocence’, purity, virginity, and whiteness. To the concept of whiteness, ‘[t]he cleansing metaphor of baptism is central. Sin is seen as a stain which water

³⁴⁰ Richard Dyer, *White* (1997), p. 74.

washes away. Baptism unites cleanliness and goodness.³⁴¹ Wanda's tears symbolically baptise her. 'The identification of women with whiteness, and men as searchers after whiteness, is central to the construction of skin white people.' Wanda's whiteness functions as an addition to her desirability for Ivan: 'And on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical heavenly light'.³⁴²

Hipkin's study on the prostitute in Italian cinema between 1940-65 recognises in this figure a 'borderline identity', in as much as she is often presented in the plot as a contrast to 'virtuous women', but can also destabilise 'the hegemony of respectable femininities'. Wanda is balancing between those two sides of the figure of the prostitute; will this character serve as a warning, or will she become one?

Following what is argued in chapter one, during the final years of the fascist reign,

[t]he very qualities that Italians had sometimes been seen to share with blacks – earthiness, sensuality, emotional expressiveness, a lack of embarrassment about the body – were to be banished.³⁴³

After the end of World War II, one of the direct consequences of the Allied presence on Italian soil was a contact with American culture, from clothing, medicines, and food, to film: 'Hollywood cinema was an integral part of the experience of the transition from war to peace and recovery for many Italians.'³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Richard Dyer, *White* (1997), p. 75.

³⁴² Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 146.

³⁴³ Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima. Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 99.

³⁴⁴ Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima* (2007), p. 109.

With its cinema came its freer depictions of women: ‘the US introduced into post-war Italy ideas of sex appeal, such as female sexuality employed for commercial ends [...]’.³⁴⁵ As a reaction to this new sexualized imaginary of woman, the Catholic Church created a Reformation campaign, in which the principal message was that feminine beauty ‘belongs in the face.’³⁴⁶ Stephen Gundle shows a large amount of magazines that published photographs of women’s faces as the epitome of *italianità*: ‘[a]ppropriately, the republic itself was often represented by the face of a woman.’³⁴⁷ Wanda’s close-up at the end of *Lo sceicco bianco*, and her changing from a revealing ‘harem’ dress to an ‘appropriate’ black gown in which all emphasis is on her face, confirms this theory and further contextualizes the film. Since she is depicted through the comedic style of the grotesque, Ivan’s need to recognise in her signs of her ‘femininity’, whiteness, and *italianità*, is ridiculed.

All *commedia all’italiana* tropes are present in *Lo sceicco bianco*. The last scene is a confirmation of the hegemonic power of the Church as the institution producing the narrative on how to *fare bella figura*, and the formal acceptance of it by Wanda and Ivan. The grandeur of *Piazza San Pietro* is emphasized by the low camera angle and by the fact that we see the architecture of the piazza surrounding the characters (images 26, 27): the family is completely framed by the Vatican, both literally, and figuratively. As they run in a clown-like pace towards the *Basilica di San Pietro*, the camera points upwards, towards the sky: the very last shot of the film is a zoom-in on a sculpture of an angel, very similar

³⁴⁵ Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima* (2007), p. 112.

³⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁷ Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima* (2007), p. 115.

to the one of the *Ponte Sant'Angelo*. It is as though the family is performing for the angel: they are framed as *italiani medi* by the Church's guidelines – and by the filmmakers, and the viewers of the film. They are the ones being fetishized in Ahmed's terms according to the structure of the film.

The city of Rome, more than merely a background for the plot, and *romanità*, a constant presence in *Lo sceicco bianco*, communicate specific facets of *italianità*, and of whiteness. Wanda and Ivan's outsider perspectives on the city facilitate an objectifying and fetishising look towards the metropole and its inhabitants, since the film is shot POV – this objectifying gaze is clear from the opening credits, with its touristic collage of framed famous Roman monuments. While the Romans temporarily colonise the Fregene beach, the sea is the *fotoromanzo*'s setting for encounters between 'good' and 'bad', and represents a portal to the outsider world. It is on the beach that Oscar the Cruel Sheik arrives with his ships to challenge the White Sheik. It is, moreover, in the water that Wanda does not know who she is anymore, away from 'her' land, and outside of the cultural metropole of Rome. The city of Rome, as such, functions like a cartoon frame, keeping the protagonists in a setting where they are likely to perform their white *italianità*.

During an eating scene with the family, Ivan and his uncle decide that Wanda simply should not eat at all, as she is ill. Food, though playing a minor role in the film, reconfirms gender difference, and racial 'difference'. Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco* eats and drinks in many scenes, whereas Wanda/Fatma refuses any kind of food offered by him. As *lo sceicco bianco*, he thus represents the notion of the grotesque body, 'a body in the act of becoming', as described by Bakhtin:

it is never finished, never completed; it continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world [...].³⁴⁸

Dyer recognises as well a link between physical, and gastronomic, appetite, which both do not fit with the ‘cult of virginity’. Fasting, he argues moreover, ‘makes the person look paler and signifies lack of corporeal engagement with the world, the body not dirtied by having had matter stuffed into it.’³⁴⁹

The network of frames in *Lo sceicco bianco* illustrates the complex constructs of *italianità* and its o/Others – and the grotesque reality that follows a lack of insight into the constructive nature of these notions. However, the film portrays Black, Orientalised, outsider characters primarily when both the validity of projecting a sense of otherness by Italian characters, and the need for an Other in order to belong, is questioned and ridiculed – therefore still centralising the perspective of Italian subjects, although the arbitrariness of these projections is emphasised, since all of them can easily belong or differ by means of a costume change. As such, the film’s plot denaturalises the Italian identity, typical for the *commedia all’italiana*. The obsessive need for Italian characters to come across as white illustrates the anxiety surrounding the complex notion of ‘belonging’, referring to the specific Italian context of the loss of the war and the uncertainty of any sense of a collective identity thereafter.

In the eyes of the protagonists, the idea of belonging is predominantly related to Catholicism, and its antonym is to be perceived as ‘mad’ – as described

³⁴⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais And His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), pp. 317-18.

³⁴⁹ Richard Dyer, *White* (1997), p. 77.

by Foucault in his *Madness and Civilization*.³⁵⁰ While observing that in Italian the two words ‘cristiano’ and ‘uomo’ can be used interchangeably, Antonio Gramsci notices that prisoners were often referred to as ‘borghesi e detenuti o scherzosamente borghesi e soldati sebbene i meridionali dicano anche cristiani e detenuti.’³⁵¹ In the case of *Lo sceicco bianco*, this prison could be replaced by a madhouse in the Foucauldian sense; both institutions are the habitat for ‘outcasts’, ergo, for non-Christians.

The fact that whiteness, both in skin tone, and in dress, is one of the principal indicators of displaying female *italianità* and virtuous desirability in a heterosexual, and Christian, context, reveals autoreferential racist tendencies as described by Pierre-André Taguieff: racism based on an alienation of outsiders, in order to celebrate a sense of self.³⁵² It is the male gaze for which this female whiteness is performed; through the whiteness of their female partners, male characters are able to communicate their functionality in the patriarchal society. The cult of the white woman’s virginity, moreover, steers the erotic gaze towards prostitutes (Ivan might have gone home with one), and Oriental, Black, exotic, etc. Others, illustrated in the film in a naïve, fantasised, and cartoonish manner in the shape of (sets of) *fotoromanzi*.

The clear gender difference presented in *Lo sceicco bianco* is illustrated as well in the fact that both Fernando and Ivan allude to extramarital activities, and *lo sceicco bianco*/Fernando represents the carnivalesque body. However, both

³⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization. A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2009).

³⁵¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1977), Quaderno I (XVI), p. 28.

³⁵² See chapter one; cfr. Gaia Giuliani, Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero. Storia dell’identità razziale degli italiani* (Milan: Le Monnier, 2013).

Fernando and Ivan reveal their shame and fear in front of their wives after having been (supposedly) adulterous. These portrayals are confirmed in Pier Paolo Pasolini's documentary *Comizi d'amore* (1964): interviewing people across Italy on issues such as sex, love, and marriage, the overall conclusion is that women are less free sexually, because of the Catholic morality. However, both men and women are trapped in having to perform their gender roles: men complain that they are not the Don Giovanni type, whereas women suffer from not enjoying the same privileges as their male peers: 'io non sono libera', as Wanda tells Fernando/*lo sceicco bianco*.

Not much is resolved in *Lo sceicco bianco*. For both Wanda and Ivan, the fear of being perceived as 'mad' and, as a concrete consequence, of being put back in a mental institution, is lingering in a constant Foucauldian angst. They do not follow the paternal law, dictated by the Catholic Church, naturally, or happily. Constructions of their identities appear as very fragile. They have chosen to perform the roles of white *buoni cristiani*, portrayed through the comedic approach of the grotesque, while Bernini's architectural frame encloses them, revealing that everything is only a theatre play (typical for the *commedia all'italiana*) in which they are trapped.

The colonialist attitude of the *fotoromanzo* crew members is problematized, yet no solution or alternative is offered to this aggressive behaviour. The actions of the priest, furthermore, invite a dialogue about the problematic reality of the social construct of 'race' that continues to impact society, and the fact that this is not acknowledged through a grotesquely portrayed denial of the reality the protagonists of the film find themselves in, attests to the need to discuss a past in which this mode of behaviour was created and/or applauded. *Lo sceicco bianco*,

therefore, is about the white, heterosexual, and middleclass protagonists, and about how they suffer from their closed reality. The Black character's subjectivity is denied by the Italian characters, for which he remains exactly that: A Black Other. His scenes raise questions and problems, while offering no solutions; the film deconstructs the notion of *italianità*, yet offers no reconstruction.

The film's finale, however, is dominated by an atmosphere of doubt: Wanda and Ivan's individual anxieties surrounding imaginaries of belonging, and therefore of a sense of a (racial) national identity, symbolise the uncertain situation the peninsula found itself in shortly after the loss of World War II, during a public ignorance of the imperial enterprises, in which Italy occupied an in-between space. Any form of fetishizing, specifically of a physical kind, is therefore welcomed with open arms by Ivan and Wanda, out of a desperate need to feel like belonging. The layers of physical difference create a complex system in which it is not always clear who will belong, and who will not.

Catholicism, moreover, reveals strong parallels to colonialism, since one could say that 'it' stimulates a celebration and idolisation of a sense of whiteness and pureness in *Lo sceicco bianco* (and indeed in the Italian context of the time) which as a logical opposite has Blackness, and impurity. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller assert that Italian colonialism started before the nation state's unification, with Italian Catholic missionaries going to Eritrea as early as in 1837.³⁵³ Rome represents in both films a colonizing, hegemonic power. This links it to its Ancient past, its colonial aspirations, and emphasises a need for a metropole. The film offers an open ending, which leaves the way for connecting it with other films, narratives, and reflections surrounding notions discussed in this film.

³⁵³ Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (ed), *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. xiv.

Images



9 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.28.21)



10 Federico Fellini, Preparational drawing for *Lo sceicco bianco*



11 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.33.34)



12 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.34.34)



13 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.38.10)



14 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.38.12)



15 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.38.01)



16 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.38.12)



17 Still *Lo sceicco bianco*, Federico Fellini, 1952 (0.38.13)



18 Italian propaganda manifest, 1944 (34x24cm, Biblioteca Civica, Biella)



19 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (13.36)



20 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (13.38)



21 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (14.08)



22 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (1.21.28)



23 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (1.13.14)



24 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (1.25.47)



25 Padre Fedele Tirrito, *L'immacolata concezione*, 1759-61, oil on canvas, 400 x 250 cm, *Chiesa Madre Casteltermini*, Sicily



26 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (1.26.04)



27 Still *Lo sceicco bianco* (1.26.06)

4. “Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night”: *italianità* as a performance in *Il moralista*

Apart from Natalie Fullwood’s study on the *Commedia all’italiana* (see below), *Il moralista* (directed by Giorgio Bianchi, written by L. Corda, E.M. Margadonna, Oreste Biancoli, Vincenzo Talarico, and Rodolfo Sonego, 1959) is hardly mentioned in overviews on Italian cinema after World War II by established scholars, and, whereas Giorgio Bianchi has directed several celebrated films (apart from *Il moralista*, we can think of *Il conte Max*, 1957, and *Il mio amico Benito*, 1962) he too is largely obscured by these same scholars.³⁵⁴ For this study, however, *Il moralista*’s theme is particularly relevant since it specifically discusses questions surrounding belonging and difference, the notion of *fare bella figura*, and a presumed *italianità*.³⁵⁵ Black Others that appear bring to the fore the particular racially loaded relationship between them and characters that are presented as ‘typically Italian moralists’, and they once again intersect with gender difference. Furthermore, as Mariapia Comand observes, Sordi’s stature as the *italiano medio in assoluto*, ‘il più noto esponente della commedia all’italiana [...] diventato un simbolo nazionale con tanto di sigillo istituzionale’, indicates an ever more subtle distinction between reality and representation.³⁵⁶ *Il moralista* is a

³⁵⁴ Cfr. Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cent’anni di cinema italiano. 2. Dal 1945 ai giorni nostri* (Rome: Edizioni Laterza, 1991), pp. 40, 55, 69, Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neorealism to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1983), Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, *Comedy Italian Style. The Golden Age of Italian Film Comedies* (New York: Continuum, 2008), pp. 24, 200, Ernesto G. Laura, *Comedy, Italian Style* (Rome: CIES, 1981), p. 65.

³⁵⁵ On the process of making *Il moralista*, cfr. Tatti Sanguinetti, ‘Il Moralista’, in *Il cervello di Alberto Sordi: Rodolfo Sonego e il suo cinema* (Milan: Adelphi, 2015), Kindle ebook.

³⁵⁶ Mariapia Comand, *Commedia all’italiana* (Milan: Il castoro, 2010), p. 37.

fascinating account of these cinematographically interrelated notions (of reality and representation), typical for comedies, which largely depend on their contingency principle. The moralist of the title fits the trope of the double-faced man, and only once we get to see the hidden part of his persona, several Black Others appear – paralleling the official ignorance of Black subjects as part of ‘Italy’s’ past and present, as opposed to its unconscious reality, which indeed always included Black subjects. Alberto Sordi portrays this double-faced man through the comedic approach of the grotesque. The undertone of ridicule invites viewers to reflect on the performativity of the very notions of *italianità* and the *italiano medio*, which could therefore both be interpreted as a mask. Finally, the time frame of *Il moralista* perfectly fits in the corpus of this research.

The film plot centres around a character that could be described as a professional moralist, Agostino (Alberto Sordi), the newly appointed general secretary of the Organizzazione Internazionale della Moralità Pubblica (OIMP), who establishes a rigorously strict set of rules concerning the amount of flesh (images of) women are allowed to show in plays and films, posters, and in public places: he goes at war ‘against vulgarity’. This attitude is ridiculed through the comedic approach of the grotesque from the very beginning of the film; The opening credits are shots made at night on iconic Roman spaces and monuments, such as the Coliseum, and *Piazza della Repubblica*, with the titles in neon lights edited over these shots, illustrating on the one hand the grandeur of the city, while on the other hand, referring to the atmosphere of nightclubs.

Accompanying these images is a song, *Il moralista*, sung by actor and singer Fred Buscaglione, famous for his portrayal of Mafiosi types, both in films, and in his music. The lyrics mock the simplicity of the principle of moralism:

‘Moralista, mi sa dire, la morale che cos’è? | È una frottola per i semplici, ma non è fatta per me’.

Comedy’s contingency principle is illustrated in the many references to the filmmakers’ contexts: Agostino’s character is based on Agostino Greggi who, as a politician for the *Democrazia Cristiana* in 1957 started a petition against Brigitte Bardot’s revealing clothes in the film *Miss Spogliarello* (probably Louis Malle’s *Viva Maria!* of 1965).³⁵⁷ Moreover, Giorgio Bianchi’s 1951 film *Porca miseria!* had undergone censorship not dissimilar to the one pictured in *Il moralista* (see below).³⁵⁸ Finally, the film is produced one year after the *Legge Merlin* (1958), which made state-run brothels close down.³⁵⁹

The Catholic Church’s claimed dominance over the protagonists establishes itself immediately. The first scenes are set in a night bar, whose owner Giovanni (Franco Fabrizi) is baffled by the sudden OIMP decision to close it down, and asks for a clarification. Three thousand mothers have signed a petition against the club, is the answer he receives. The Catholic Church as the ‘creator and defender of the family’, became a key theme in the ideological battle against Communism in the 1950s: family life and values became ‘the crucial ideological terrain on which the opposition between Catholicism and Communism [was]

³⁵⁷ Tatti Sanguinetti, ‘Il Moralista’, in *Il cervello di Alberto Sordi: Rodolfo Sonego e il suo cinema* (Milan: Adelphi, 2015), Kindle ebook; Sergio Tanzarella, *Gli anni difficili: Lorenzo Milani, Tommaso Fiore e le Esperienze pastorali* (Trapani: Il pozzo di Giacobbe, 2008), p. 72.

³⁵⁸ <http://www.sturzo.it/sottos/revisione.html> (accessed 29 October, 2017).

³⁵⁹ Danielle Hipkins, *Italy’s Other Women. Gender and Prostitution in Italian Cinema, 1940-1965* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 3.

based.³⁶⁰ The emphasis on the mothers having signed the petition refers to this narrative – the fictional OIMP is inspired by the actual ideology of the Catholic Church.

Fullwood associates the space of nightclubs with femininity, together with ‘the leisure space of beaches (...) and the domestic space of the kitchen’, whereas ‘the spaces of the office and the car are the primary sites that the genre uses in its construction of masculinity.’ Indeed, women are fetishized and commodified in the (following) scenes in the nightclub, as convincingly argued by Fullwood also in relation to this film.³⁶¹

The following scenes are set in the head office of the OIMP, a large space ornamented with Baroque sculpture, frescoes, and architectural details, cinematographically framing the theatrical moral superiority with which this organization attempts to establish itself. Referring to Fullwood, the setting in an office of this scene underlines Agostino’s masculinity, and seriousness. However, Sordi’s portrayal of this character reveals a particularly posed, stiff, physical performance; an intense gaze through his glasses, and his peculiar haircut, clothing, and behaviour, exactly critique this kind of behavior, suggesting that something has yet to reveal itself.³⁶²

³⁶⁰ Jeff Pratt, ‘Two Images of Catholicism’, in *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*, ed. David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp 178-81 (p. 178).

³⁶¹ Natali Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, Everyday Space* (2016), pp. 15, 20-21.

³⁶² ‘È uno che ha i capelli che gli sfuggono da tutte le parti, elettrici, sorride al presidente, ma sorride a fior di denti e intanto gli impone le cose... è vestito col pantalone un po’ scampanato e sotto gli si vede la pelle bianca e il calzino arrotolato... Ha un vestito che gli fa il sedere quadrato, la giacca a doppiopetto, sembra un perbene ma in realtà si capisce che ha qualcosa da nascondere...’ Tatti Sanguinetti, ‘Il Moralista’, in *Il cervello di Alberto Sordi: Rodolfo Sonego e il suo cinema* (Milan: Adelphi, 2015), Kindle ebook.

Through the loudspeaker, we hear Agostino's voice, proclaiming that 'per vincere una battaglia è necessario prima di tutto conoscere il nemico e non sottovalutarlo! E sapete chi è? [...] La moda che rende più visibili e provocanti le forme femminili!' The reaction to Hollywood's sexualized depiction of women was the Catholic Church's Reformation campaign's principal message that feminine beauty 'belongs in the face.'³⁶³ Whereas the OIMP is a fictional organisation, it echoes the organisation which had demanded Giorgio Bianchi himself to change lines and content for *Porca miseria!*. Particularly during Giulio Andreotti's role as the Under-Secretary for Entertainment in DC-led governments between 1947 and 1953, the *Centro Cattolico Cinematografico* brought about 'an interlocking of state and private Catholic interests'.³⁶⁴ Tatti Sanguinetti and Rodolfo Sonogo discuss the auto-censorship filmmakers applied to their films as follows: 'Era tutta una società, era tutto un costume... Per i manifesti dei film le discussioni con il disegnatore erano infinite. "Tira più su, tira più giù... leva che è troppo!"'.³⁶⁵ Moreover, Masolino D'Amico asserts that politicians working on issues of censorship were generally less forgiving towards 'serious' cinema – especially towards neorealism – whereas *commedie all'italiana* (which he describes as 'cinema leggero') were allowed relative creative freedom, since

³⁶³ Stephen Gundle, *Bellissima. Feminine Beauty and the Idea of Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 112. Cfr. Richard Dyer, *White* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), Jeff Pratt, 'Catholic Culture', in *Italian Cultural Studies, an Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 129-43.

³⁶⁴ Franco Bianchini, Massimo Torrigiani, and Rinella Cere, 'Cultural Policy', in *Italian Cultural Studies, an Introduction*, ed. by David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 291-308 (p. 294).

³⁶⁵ Cfr. Rodolfo Sonogo in Tatti Sanguinetti, 'Il Moralista', in *Il cervello di Alberto Sordi: Rodolfo Sonogo e il suo cinema* (Milan: Adelphi, 2015), Kindle ebook.

filmmakers had the excuse of simply making audiences laugh.³⁶⁶

The lyrics of the song *Il moralista* mock the principle of moralism in the opening credits, and this mockery continues as soon as we hear Agostino's voice through a loudspeaker preaching his moralism, and see him coming through the door of the main hall of the OIMP, while posing for photographers and journalists. The performative nature of Agostino's behaviour is accentuated in continuation. He bows, poses for photos, and shouts out aggressively, 'riprendiamo il lavoro! Non dimentichiamo gli obblighi della nostra missione!' The idea of a mission recalls Catholic missionaries going to Africa in order to bring Catholicism to the Southern continent. Immediately afterwards, Agostino conducts meetings with several groups of people, through which the comedic approach of the grotesque is communicated. Among Agostino's guests are a member of the *Commissione per la campagna contro l'hula hop* – indicating a grotesque undertone –, an actress (Mara Berni) who fails to seduce the moralist into changing his opinion about her 'indecent' appearance in her first film, and two men who try to sell a face moisturiser through a publicity poster of a woman in a bikini. This scene follows the 'manifesti' referred to by Sonego quite literally; 'tira più su, tira più giù!'

From the opening credits of the film, in which we see grand monuments of the *città eterna* ornamented with neon lights, certain binaries through the eyes of the protagonists are constantly emphasised as opposites, such as high culture vs.

³⁶⁶ Masolino D'Amico, *La commedia all'italiana. Il cinema comico in Italia dal 1945 al 1975* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2008), pp. 30-32. The plot of *Il moralista* is a testament to this, since it deals explicitly, and through the comedic approach of the grotesque, mockingly, with the issue of political censorship based on Catholic morality.

low culture, seriousness vs. humour, political intellectual discourse vs. physical contact - and indeed, whiteness vs. Blackness. Agostino has a particularly good relationship with the president of the OIMP (Vittorio De Sica); the latter hopes to match his daughter Virginia (Franca Valeri) to Agostino, telling Virginia that he has the highest respect for Agostino since he is ‘un puro.’ The admiration of being ‘pure’ (and not carnivalesque) connects to discourses surrounding whiteness, as discussed by Richard Dyer (‘absent from white is any *thing*; in other words, material reality. Cleanliness is the absence of dirt, spirituality the absence of flesh, virtue the absence of sin, chastity the absence of sex,’ etc³⁶⁷), and Steven Aschheim (‘[t]he normal (and ideal) bourgeois is held to be manly, self-controlled, honest, healthy, clean, and handsome; outsiders are abnormal, effeminate, nervous, sickly, wily, dirty, and ugly’).³⁶⁸ Cristina Lombardi-Diop’s analysis of Italian medical and hygiene manuals between the 1930s-1960s brings to the fore that whiteness ‘divenne una caratteristica che attribuisce omogeneità al popolo italiano’.³⁶⁹ Her examination, for instance, of the little black chick *Calimero* that ‘luckily’ turns white when washed well – ‘il bianco (cioè il prodotto [Ava]) che trionfa sul nero (cioè lo sporco)’ – is particularly fascinating as *Calimero* later exceeded Italian national boundaries, becoming an

³⁶⁷ Richard Dyer, *White* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 75.

³⁶⁸ Steve E. Aschheim, *At the Edges of Liberalism: Junctions of European, German, and Jewish History* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p. 149.

³⁶⁹ Cristina Lombardi-Diop, ‘L’Italia cambia pelle. La bianchezza degli italiani dal Fascismo al boom economico’, in *Bianco e nero. Storia dell’identità razziale degli italiani*, ed. by Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop (Milan: Le Monnier, 2013), pp. 67-116 (pp. 68, 115).

internationally famous cartoon character.³⁷⁰

However, Agostino turns out to be less ‘pure’ than initially suspected, as his hidden features slowly reveal themselves to the viewer. Though Agostino’s traditional approach to marriage (no physical intimacy before the wedding) seems unfit for the modern Virginia, who has just returned from non-Catholic England where she drank whiskey and went out with men, they continue to spend time together after their first encounter. On one particular evening, they dance together, and she is surprised by his sense of rhythm. He explains that his father played the contrabass, and that he has spent his childhood in nightclubs and bars, which is where he learned a lot about the object of his current profession. Free music is here also interpreted as belonging to the ‘lower’ parts of society, coupled with dance, and physical intimacy, referring to Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque, which, containing the word ‘carne’, literally refers to humans’ flesh, in the context of the film, opposed to being ‘puro’.³⁷¹ Places like nightclubs and music bars are generally portrayed in *commedie all’italiana* – in *Il moralista*, and also in films such as *Anna* (Alberto Lattuada, 1951) or *Adua e le sue compagne* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1960) – as potentially dangerous, low-culture, and/or immoral loci, the trope of Black subjects visible in backgrounds of nightclubs confirms the trope of ‘Blackness as bad’, and refer to hidden elements

³⁷⁰ Cfr. Derek Duncan, ‘Italian Identity and the Risks of Contamination: The Legacies of Mussolini’s Demographic Impulse in the Work of Comisso, Flaiano and Dell’Oro’, in *Italian Colonialism. Legacy and Memory*, ed. Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 99-124, Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices’, in *Italian Colonialism*, pp. 165-90.

³⁷¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, in *The Bakhtin Reader, Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Arnold Publishers, 1994), pp. 194-206.

of the society.

Agostino's relationship with Virginia facilitates a vicinity to his boss, who asks him to take his place at an international convention in Munich to deliver a speech representing Italy – again, alluding to the trope of a (colonial) 'mission'. Whereas the president decides to spend his sudden free time with the actress who failed to get her way with Agostino, the latter delivers a passionate speech against the vulgarization of films and commercials, and the nudity of women in particular, receiving loud applause from the international audience in Munich. After a while, he specifically directs his discourse towards the subject of striptease, *lo spogliarello* – a clear reference to Agostino Greggì's campaign against Bardot's performance in *Miss Spogliarello*. Agostino walks away from his desk and takes place in the middle of the large room, framed on all sides by the other participants of the conference sitting behind their desks. He then starts to perform the act of striptease in order to explain what goes on in night clubs – albeit without actually removing his clothes.

The intrinsically comical effect of his striptease act makes Agostino the object of the film viewers' laughter. But inside of the film plot Agostino represents Italy for an international audience, which turns him into the spectacle (image 28), denaturalizing his Italian identity, and/or 'Italy's' identity. For a moment, he becomes the framed *Miss Spogliarello*, on an individual level altering his presumed gender identity, and class status. Therefore, instead of recognizing in *Il moralista* a confirmation of the binary construct of gender difference, I recognize in this scene exactly the questioning of these. The fact that Agostino shifts his identity through means of a performance, destabilises Agostino's fixed identity, illustrating that the binaries of female and male, spectacle and observer,

and someone in charge and someone submissive, are of a performative nature. In Agostino's representation of 'Italy', we can then also recognise an embodiment of Italy's in-betweenness.

As soon as the low culture world comes to life in the film, the notion of racial difference comes into play, gradually becoming more explicitly established by *italiano medio* characters. Agostino tells the conference members he will do research in striptease bars in Munich, and two women volunteer to join him. At the strip club, the first shot on the stage is on the band, with a contrabass in the very front of the frame, reminding us of Agostino's father's (hidden) profession, and emphasising his interpretation of this world as 'low culture'. The band members are the first physically distinguishable characters from characters identified as *italiani medi* because of their much darker skin tone. Therefore, their appearances reiterate the trope of the Black men in the background of bars or nightclubs, as seen in, for instance, *Persiane chiuse* (Luigi Comencini, 1951), *Amori di mezzo secolo* (Antonio Pietrangeli, 1954), and *Tutti a casa* (Luigi Comencini, 1960).

Agostino's *spogliarello* performance confirms his familiarity with the world of night clubs, hinting at the unconscious aspects of his persona, which are more clearly expressed when a woman appears onstage, and Agostino's facial expression changes from anger (morally justifiable) to eagerness (sexual appetite, deplorable) - a variation on the Melpomene and Thalia theatrical mask couple. He tells his female colleagues that they have seen enough, as they belong to the world in which he performs his high culture status. He leaves with them, only to come back right afterwards all by himself. After a talk with the striptease performer, the

latter eventually quits her job, and will go with Agostino to Italy, after he has convinced her that she will make more money there.

In the scenes that follow, the hierarchy between public mask (lightness, performative) and private persona (darkness, hidden) is expressed even more overtly in racial terms, and in gender and sexuality difference, emphasizing the intersectional nature of Agostino's differentiating. When he tells his international colleagues the next day at the convention that he, who knows 'le bassezze della società' because his father was a bass player, has saved one woman, and will go back to Italy to do more good deeds, he receives loud applause again – here, he establishes his public persona, fitting the official narrative of 'Italy' as morally just (*italiani brava gente*); *fa bella figura*. Instead of going straight back to Italy, however, he pays a visit to theatre agent Mr Krüger, where Agostino's hidden persona is revealed. At the latter's office, two German women who dance for Agostino and Mr Krüger, respond with horror to the two men's request to 'entertain the men after their performance'; they consider themselves artists, and walk away. Agostino's denigrating attitude becomes clear when he tells Krüger that '[n]on glielo dovevi chiedere!'; we should have simply brought them to Italy – then they would have been forced to do as we say, he argues. He repeatedly asks for a Swedish woman 'for *Banana Bo*', which later turns out to be a night club.

Several linguistic aspects indicate the presumed social rank of the following characters, in terms of gender, class, and particularly, race. 'So io cosa ti occorre', Krüger responds, and whistles. Three loudly shouting women with high pitch voices run inside, accompanied by loud, upbeat tempo music. They dance enthusiastically and freely – given their darker skin tone, confirming the trope of the physical, 'animalistic', Black Other as discussed in chapter one, and

above (1.13.22, image 29). ‘Ma quale svedese, la negretta gli do agli commendatori!’ Agostino replies eagerly, implying an obvious distinction between white Swedish women and eroticised Black women, and revealing a much stronger Roman accent than we have heard thus far.

His sudden strong Roman accent identifies his ‘folk’ part, and underlines his ‘lower culture’ status. Krüger’s whistling, moreover, echoes *Io la conoscevo bene*’s whistling character who communicates with the birds (I refer here to a film discussed in an earlier chapter, yet it was produced six years later), both accentuating the ‘animalistic’ characteristic of Black characters, and simultaneously alluding to alternative manners of communication to language. Finally, the gender and diminutive of the word ‘negrette’ underlines Agostino’s desperate need for placing himself in a higher societal order than others. The combination of race and gender emphasises Agostino’s double dispraising undertone.

This gender binary is complicated by what follows. Krüger tells Agostino to be careful ‘with these ones’; ‘quella è un uomo!’ In horror, Agostino looks back at Krüger. ‘No!’, he shouts, and walks up to the women. ‘Macché, sei un omo tu?’, he asks one of the women, putting up a facial expression (a mask) of disgust. ‘Sì’, she replies, in a remarkably deep voice which is comical for the viewer, and monstrous to Agostino, a combination typical for the comedic approach of the grotesque as argued in chapter two. Krüger explains that she did not want to be a soldier, which is why she dresses as a woman. ‘Come me!’, Agostino concludes, which involuntarily diminishes their differences twofold – both their gender difference, and their biographical difference. When he asks where they are from, Krüger replies that the answer to that question is

complicated: they are not quite illegal, but there are many complications. Agostino says that the complications are good – this will make them protest less. He treats them as commodities in Marxist terms, and as strangers in Sara Ahmed’s sense, a trope in the *commedia all’italiana*, according to Bini.³⁷² Russo Bullaro’s theory discussed in chapter one suggesting that before the 1980s films made in Italy did not, or hardly, discuss ‘extracomunitari’, is nuanced by Agostino’s assumption of these women.

In what follows, again, the linguistic information provided is illustrative of hierarchies presumed by Agostino, which do not correspond to the ‘reality’ offered in the film. ‘Voi piace Italia? Anche you piaci mi!’, he tells the three women while walking towards them. ‘Grazie’, the woman with the low voice responds. ‘Zitta tu, sei un omo sei!’, Agostino tells her in horror. His hybrid language on the one hand reveals his (imperial) projection of *italianità* onto the world, seen through the eyes of an Italian subject; he displays an Italian interpretation of people who do not come from that particular language or culture, naturalising *italianità*. Moreover, by communicating with them through some sort of simplified version of his language, he belittles them, assuming they will not understand its complexions.

bell hooks’ observation that ‘Black males must be made subordinate in as many cultural arenas as possible’, is only partially an indication for Agostino’s extra dismissive behaviour towards the cross-dressing man.³⁷³ A fear of homoerotic fantasies, and of homosexual contact or experience, underlies Agostino’s disgust; after all, he was, or is, attracted to this man. It will shortly

³⁷² Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 8 (see below).

³⁷³ bell hooks, *Reel to Real. Race, Class and Sex at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, repr. 2009), p. 105.

become clear he does have sex before marriage, he trades in women, and he goes to night clubs, illustrating that Agostino dismisses several characteristics of his public persona when he enters the realm of low-culture life. However, he does not change his sexuality nor his gender or racial identity, when taking off his public mask, since these are some of the few aspects of his ‘hidden’ character that still mark him – from his perspective – as superior to the Black characters he encounters. In this film, the *italiano medio*’s perceived identity remains constant in this perspective, despite the fact that Agostino’s grotesque rejection clearly reveals an attraction to the man dressed as a woman.

Agostino’s holding on to heteronormativity continues the silence surrounding homosexuality in the Italian context, similar to the silence surrounding the Black characters in the Italian history, and their appearances in the films discussed in this thesis (see chapter one, particularly pp. 79-80). As argued by Giovanni Dall’Orto, after World War II,

l’omosessualità è diventata, in Italia, il regno del non-detto, dei sussurri, degli eufemismi, dei giri di parole, dei volti nascosti: un mondo che c’è però non esiste, perché non ha diritto ad affiorare alla realtà.³⁷⁴

This Italian tradition illustrates a link with the morality of the Catholic Church, which condemned, and condemns, homosexuality.³⁷⁵ Whereas Agostino acknowledges the presence of Black subjects, he does so in order to establish a

³⁷⁴ Cfr. Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Queering European Sexualities Through Italy’s Fascist Past: Colonialism, Homosexuality, and Masculinities’, in *What’s Queer about Europe? Productive Encounters and Re-enchanting Paradigms*, ed. by Sudeep Dasgupta and Mireille Rosello (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

³⁷⁵ Cfr. Gerard Loughlin, ‘Introduction: The End of Sex’, in *Queer Theology. Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. by Gerard Loughlin (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 1-34.

distinction between himself and these characters – his hybrid and simplified language emphasises the difference he seeks to establish between him and the Black characters; it is to his advantage to keep racial, gender, and class binaries intact, in order to maintain his superior position in his social context. In the appearance of the Black cross-dressing man, however, the binary of male and female is blurred. Agostino consequentially becomes visibly and verbally uncomfortable, on the one hand making explicit that he is dealing with a man, yet at the same time not quite having ready an ‘adequate’ response to this, in his eyes, confusing, reality - confusing, since his reality is shaped by the constructed binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality, as argued by Sedwick.

His attempt to automatically eroticise Black characters, and to treat them as commodities, is an affirmation of never refuted imperial narratives surrounding the notion of Blackness. The female characteristics of the Black man (as opposed to the white *italiano medio*) stereotypes these Black characters. Their female features are accentuated, while their male features are ignored, downplayed, or silenced, confusing to Agostino; thinking back to Aschheims’ quote, the notion of being ‘effeminate’ is presented as the opposite of the ‘normal’, male, and ideal bourgeois. Indeed, Agostino’s hidden persona is a space which is associated with femininity, as argued by Fullwood.

The assumption of Agostino being a ‘puro’, and an explicit link to the notion of whiteness, is reflected in Virginia’s assumption of her father as being that as well. While she has invited a man into her house, she tries to seduce him, but he declines, worrying about her father finding them together alone in his house. She explains that they do not have to worry. ‘Per carità, papà è così candido!’, Virginia replies. The word ‘candido’ referring both to whiteness, and to

purity (the *Devoto-Oli* dictionary defines ‘candido’ with ‘Bianco immacolato, chiaro, limpido’), confirms the link between these two notions more explicitly. ‘È come dicono gli inglesi, a pure man, un puro’, Virginia confirms. While word is used to describe her father’s presumed innocence, and cleanliness, in reality, he finds himself in the countryside, about to sleep with an actress who wants him to remove censorship on her film, while he has just agreed to ordering a prostitute via the phone.

The German woman who is brought to Italy by Alberto, performs *spogliarello* in a Roman nightclub, while the president of the OIMP attends the performance. Afterwards, he goes to talk to the striptease performer, while she complains about her wage in Italy, and about how she was lied to by an Italian man (Agostino) who brought her here. He tells her in return that he is from the OIMP, and that he is there to help her; he will ask his *segretario generale* (Agostino) to marry her – un ‘uomo puro’, he adds. She thanks him for giving her a chance to change her life.

The film’s theme of appearances and underlying truths – representation and reality – are explicitly referred to the next day, when the president receives a phone call about a prostitute who is willing to see him. He hurries to the bar, and finds out that the prostitute in question is the German *spogliarello* performer. He attempts to defend himself by arguing that ‘le apparenze forse sono contro di me... voglio solo rendermi conto come certe cose avvengono nella realtà’.

The most explicit display of racism occurs in a scene with the three women Agostino has brought to Italy, as they are considered animals in the zoo – echoing the tragic story of Sara Baartman, the most well-known example of Khoi women who were exhibited as ‘freak show’ acts because of their particular

physique.³⁷⁶ While the president attempts to explain himself to the German woman, a car arrives, and the two see Agostino enter the building together with the three women he has brought from Germany (the president is quick to tell the German woman that he considers Agostino ‘una conoscenza’). Agostino walks in the building, and greets his two co-workers – his loyal secretary, and his partner. They discuss business; ‘we need an act for *Banana Bo*’, his partner says. ‘Ci portiamo le negrette’, Agostino responds proudly. ‘Fammele vedere’, his secretary shouts. The three women stand in the corner of the room, waiting. ‘Eccole qua. Te piacciono?’ The three Black women are treated as commodities even more so during the discussion about where they should sleep. The cellar is no option, since, as Agostino argues, ‘ce sono le bottiglie, quelle grattano tutto’. The women get no say in this, and are expected to stand and wait for the others to decide.

However, Agostino’s presumed control over the situation, and his superiority complex concerning the Black women, are violently turned around in the film’s finale, deconstructing the *italiano medio*’s racist, misogynist, and binary world view. When Agostino returns to the OIMP office the next day, he puts on his public *moralista* mask once again. However, his colleagues are waiting for him in the corridor to accuse him of being ‘uno che fa la tratta delle bianche’ – a ‘slave trader’, Virginia translates to English. This translation does not cover the original expression, since the notion of slave trader on the one hand could more broadly refer to any kind of (modern) slavery, whereas in a narrower sense, it is often associated with transatlantic slave trade, in which exclusively Black subjects were treated as commodities. ‘La tratta delle bianche’, on the other

³⁷⁶ Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

hand, specifically refers to the trade in white subjects. Neither interpretation of the notions covers Agostino's actions.

The president of the OIMP feels obliged to fire Agostino despite still loving him, recognising in this situation the fall of a performance of a 'uomo puro' who is secretly less 'pure' than expected, grotesquely observing this situation from a self-centred, and an *italiano medio*, perspective. Agostino defends himself by arguing that all people in this room have blood on their hands, to which former general secretary dottor Meneghotti replies with a defence: 'La nostra innocenza e immacolata'.

However hard he tries, Agostino's reality no longer corresponds to his attempt at an imperial interpretation of the women. When all men present are ready to close a deal with each other, revealing their 'moralist' masks as merely performances, the police arrive with the three Black women Agostino brought from Germany. When the police ask the women to point out to Agostino, the former kindly, and laughing innocently, do so. The police explain that Agostino has committed many crimes in various countries, and will now finally be caught and brought to prison. 'Sono arrestato per la faccenda delle negrette?', he asks, suggesting they are 'merely that', but it does not work.

When Agostino, handcuffed, is brought to the police car, Agostino uses a word play in order to hold on to a hierarchy based on skin tone in both the language and culture: 'Ma scusi che dice il codice? Tratta delle bianche? Ma quelle son' negre!', but the skin tone of these women does not change his criminal activities, whereas it might have during the colonial period. His attempt to appeal to the policemen's mechanical elasticity, which would make them still believe in the colonial epistemology and its racializing epistemology, has failed. Moreover,

he attempts to appeal to their recognition of the trope of the ‘white slaves’, which ‘focussed almost exclusively on the capture of innocent young *white* women and celebrated heroic male efforts to protect and save white womanhood’, linking it to the theme of the innocent white woman as argued in the previous chapter, and below.³⁷⁷

The film *Il moralista* slowly reveals the constant shifting of characters involved in OIMP between a public mask, and private, hidden, personality features and habits. The public, institutional appearance of characters is based on the principle of *fare bella figura*. Even though this is not directly paralleled to the Catholic morality, since the notion of *fare bella figura* is to do with social display, the morality stemming from the Catholic Church underlies the interpretation of *fare bella figura* by Agostino and his colleagues. These characters perform for the public gaze, and for the viewers of the film, deeply held moral convictions which are performed only on the surface, in the light, in ‘purity’, while they do not match the private lives of the characters.

The underlying Catholic morality idealises the ideas of cleanliness, spirituality, and purity, implicitly linking it to the cultural construct of whiteness, the private aspect of their personalities brings to the forth everything that cannot be associated with these ‘Catholic’ features; based on ‘immoral’ behaviour, this side is connected to the exploitation of people, is less performative, more physical, includes the acknowledgement of Black people within the society, includes homosexuality and transdressing, is private, interpreted as ‘low culture’ (think Agostino’s sudden Roman accent), is interested in the nude body, and is not ‘pure’, but ‘dirty’:

³⁷⁷ Hipkins, *Italy’s Other Women* (2016), p. 71.

Blackness, darkness, shadow, shades, night, the labyrinths of the earth, abysmal depths, blacken someone's reputation; and on the other side, the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical heavenly light.³⁷⁸

Characters identifiable as Black Others, since they are physically and behaviourally contrasted to characters that are presented as 'Italians', continue to occupy a marginal position in the plot of *Il moralista*. They are still considered 'out of place', quite literally, when Agostino assumes that they are illegal immigrants. However, whereas the *italiano medio*, represented here as the ultimate moralist, and as such, openly performing his interpretation of pure, white, *italianità*, attempts to hold on to an imperial narrative according to which he is superior to Black men and women, not only will Agostino be imprisoned as a consequence of his behaviour towards his interpretation of the Black Others, these three women have moreover won in agency and control, by being in charge of his arrest. Taking this into account their performance of the loud, dancing, and sexualised Black Other can be considered from a new perspective – they might have been much more in control of their role in the story than what seemed to be the case in the film up to this point. Was it all a grotesque performance, in order to get him arrested?

Il moralista, a 'film di serie B' according to many scholars, and even to one of its creators,³⁷⁹ offers through its grotesque portrayal of 'the moralist' in

³⁷⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, repr. 1986), p. 146.

³⁷⁹ Tatti Sanguinetti, 'Il Moralista', in *Il cervello di Alberto Sordi: Rodolfo Sonego e il suo cinema* (Milan: Adelphi, 2015), Kindle ebook.

assoluto, played by the *italiano medio in assoluto* Alberto Sordi, and through the main theme of reality versus representation, a particularly rich perspective on questions of belonging and difference, and on the notion of *fare bella figura*. Bini defines ‘Humor, Italian Style’ in terms of ‘the mask of conformity’, referring to the Pirandellian notion of social masks; but,

while Pirandello’s self-reflective characters strive to break free from the regular flow of life (and of the narrative), the protagonists of *commedia all’italiana* act in the opposite way.

Analyzing Sordi’s character in *I vittelloni* (‘around which this genre is born’) Bini identifies ‘a man obsessed with the way the others see him in order to conform to the social dictates.’³⁸⁰ This strongly relates with the trope of *fare bella figura* – even presented in this film (although Bini might disagree).

In many moments in the film, Agostino’s presumed distance is deconstructed through a revealing of similarities between him and ‘minor’ characters. When the Black man in drag turns out to have denied military service, Agostino realises that they are similar in that respect. His father, moreover, played music in night clubs, revealing a lower class status than he aspires to belong to. Most significantly, when he, representing Italy, performs the striptease act in front of an international crowd of politicians, he puts himself and Italy on the same level as these women, referring to the theme of the *boom* - people are considered commodities, sell themselves, and *fanno bella figura* while having a hidden persona. Whereas the film is still presented through and *italiano medio* perspective, this perspective is ridiculed through a grotesque portrayal of this character, and towards the end, through the realisation that the characters

³⁸⁰ Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 116.

presented as Black Others, actually *lo conoscevano bene*, perfectly playing the role of passive subjects until they find the right moment to take control. Agostino has already framed himself as the object of our laughter, and as the spectacle, while standing on that international stage.

These subversive elements of the actions of these Black Others characters suggest a certain level of intentionality. Questions surrounding the intentionality of the screenwriters, director, and actors consequentially come to mind. Whereas this is not my main concern in this thesis, I offer an analysis of *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* in the following chapter, in which I make a comparison between two interpretations of the same screenplay of the story *La moglie bionda*. Differences in acting, directing, and storytelling style between these two cinematographic depictions, illustrate that these choices strongly impact the direction of interpreting these filmic ‘texts’. Therefore, whether intentionally or unconsciously, I assume that choices made during the production of *Il moralista*, including the performances of the actors, the element of surprise at the end of the film, provided by a two-dimensional depiction of these three characters up to this point, and the emphasis on their Blackness both through the script, Alberto Sordi’s performance, and the cinematography, were made in order to emphasise the element of surprise of the viewers: these Black Other characters embody a subversive interpretation of both Blackness and whiteness.

Images

28 Still *Il moralista*, Giorgio Bianchi, 1959 (49.25)



29 Still *Il moralista* (1.13.22)

5 The framer is framed in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*

In this chapter, I offer an analysis of *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (Marco Ferreri, Eduardo De Filippo, Luciano Salce, 1965) with a focus on something we could call a stronger-weaker paradox: on the one hand enhancement of the binary of Black and white, and on the other hand the realization that the *italiano medio* character might not fit in either one of these categories. The particular configuration of *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, namely the cinematographic style known as *film a episodi*, particularly fits the angle of this research, and offers another perspective on the *commedia all'italiana*.

The structural formula of *film a episodi*, Italian anthology films, was commonly used between the 1950s-1970s, with *Boccaccio '70* (Federico Fellini, Vittorio De Sica, Mario Monicelli, Luchino Visconti, 1962) as the decisive film to establish its popularity.³⁸¹ These films challenge traditional boundaries of auteurist autonomy and originality, and do not conform to classical principles of narratological structures, based on the idea of one main plot, three acts, and a protagonist's arch and development.³⁸² They contain separate chapters often directed by various filmmakers, featuring several actors, which are possibly intertwined thematically, or through cooperation between, or repetition of, actors and directors. The assembly of shorter chapters combined into one film made critic Tommaso Chiaretti describe this film formula in 1954 as 'cinema per

³⁸¹ Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 159.

³⁸² David Scott Diffrient, *Episodes and Infinities: Critical Approaches to Anthology, Omnibus, Portmanteau, and Sketch Films* (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Film and Television, UCLA, 2005).

pigri'.³⁸³ He explains the gaining of popularity of the phenomenon of the anthology films as a 'ragione di tipo commerciale', since it offers producers the commercial success of three films for the price of one, including various known directors and actors that possibly attract large groups of audiences – a statement that is echoed a few decades later by Peter Bondanella.³⁸⁴ As a consequence of similar perspectives by other scholars, one could speak of a 'rimozione storiografica' of the *film a episodi* – or at least of a marginalization: two fairly recent studies by Marco Rossitti and Alice Autelitano attempt to bring the *film a episodi* out of the margins.³⁸⁵

However, all Italian filmmakers that Bondanella, and many other scholars, consider 'auteurs', produced, directed, and wrote for *film a episodi*, including Roberto Rossellini (for *L'amore*, 1948), Luchino Visconti, Michelangelo Antonioni (both for *L'amore in città*, 1953), Vittorio De Sica (for *Costa azzurra*, 1959), Federico Fellini (for *Boccaccio 70*, 1962), and Pier Paolo Pasolini (for *Ro.Go.Pa.G.*, 1963).³⁸⁶ This implies according to this same logic a certain

³⁸³ Marco Rossitti, *Il film a episodi in Italia tra gli anni cinquanta e settanta* (Bologna: Hybris, 2005), xiii, 1 – citing in turn the title of an article by Tommaso Chiaretti of 1954 in *L'Eco del cinema e dello spettacolo* (see note 1). Cfr. Guido Aristarco, 'Novellistica d'evasione', *Cinema nuovo*, III.18 (1952), 145-48, Guido Aristarco, 'La moda dei film a episodi', *Sipario*, III.30 (1954), 103, Marco Rossitti, *Il film a episodi in Italia tra gli anni cinquanta e settanta*, pp. 1-7.

³⁸⁴ Marco Rossitti, p. 1; Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 159.

³⁸⁵ Marco Rossitti, *Il film a episodi in Italia tra gli anni cinquanta e settanta* (Bologna: Hybris, 2005); Alice Autelitano, *Il cinema infranto. Intertestualità, intermedialità e forme narrative nel film a episodi italiano (1961-1976)* (Udine: Forum, 2011).

³⁸⁶ Marco Rossitti, *Il film a episodi in Italia tra gli anni cinquanta e settanta* (Bologna: Hybris, 2005), xv; see also his selected filmography of *film a episodi* between 1946-2005, 363-390, and Alice Autelitano's selected filmography in *Il cinema infranto. Intertestualità, intermedialità e forme narrative nel film a episodi italiano*

auteurist quality. Moreover, the *film a episodi* as a narrational formula is regarded as typical for the Italian cinematographic make-up, and as an integral part of the *commedia all'italiana*.³⁸⁷ Links to oral culture, vaudeville, the notion of the short story cycle, or as Enrico Giacovelli points out, the Italian novella, underline the uniquely in-between, and in some ways specifically Italian, characteristics of this filmic approach.³⁸⁸ I would, moreover, suggest to regard these films as a collection of essays: the separate-yet-together episodes each offer a specific point of view on society, with, in this case, usage of the comedic approach of the grotesque.

For these reasons, the *film a episodi* fits the approach of this research, as it offers a more complex perspective on traditional binaries – including auteur and genre, oral and visual culture, and high art and low art. This begs the question of how the notions of Black and white, and *italianità* and O/otherness, appear in these films. I chose to analyse *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (Marco Ferreri, Eduardo De Filippo, Luciano Salce, 1965) here, since it is made during the time that this film type was at its most popular, it is unanimously considered a *commedia all'italiana*, and it specifically and most explicitly discusses Fascism, North-South dichotomies, *italianità*, and notions of belonging, whiteness, and Black Otherness. The year in which the film came out also fits the time frame set for this research. The *commedia all'italiana* tropes of Catholicism, *romanità*,

(1961-1976) (Udine: Forum, 2011), pp. 179-91. Ernesto G. Laura, *Comedy, Italian Style* (Rome: CIES, 1981), pp. 43-52.

³⁸⁷ Alice Autelitano, *Il cinema infranto. Intertestualità, intermedialità e forme narrative nel film a episodi italiano (1961-1976)* (Udine: Forum, 2011), p. 13, Marco Rossitti, *Il film a episodi in Italia tra gli anni cinquanta e settanta*, p. 2.

³⁸⁸ Enrico Giacovelli, *La commedia all'italiana* (Rome: Gremese, 1990), pp. 56-58.

prostitution, food, and *fare bella figura* all play a role in the construction of a sense of *italianità* in the plots of the episodes. Finally, it is the first film of the corpus of this research in which the protagonist goes to Africa, and as such is directly confronted with former colonised territory and its inhabitants.

Corresponding to the ‘in-betweenness’ of the *film a episodi* as an approach, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* offers a more complex perspective on characters’ physical differences. It ridicules openly the *italiano medio* protagonist’s attempt to ‘belong’ by coming across as white, and/or as non-Black, by physically placing him more ‘in-between’ in this scale in terms of skin tone, and by turning his worldview upside-down; characters that are imagined as Black Other by the protagonist, turn the colonial gaze around by framing (or fetishizing, in Sara Ahmed’s terms) the *italiano medio* character instead.

Below, I analyse all three episodes of the film on a molecular and molar level, with a strong focus on the last part, *La moglie bionda*, written by Castellano, Pipolo, and Luciano Salce, and directed by the latter. This episode is the most interesting regarding the main questions of this study, since it takes place largely in Africa, it is the longest episode (45’, whereas the first is 30’ long, and the second 20’), and it is presented somewhat as the culmination of the film; the international title of the film is *Kiss the Other Sheik*, which refers to the plot of *La moglie bionda*, centralising this particular chapter of the film. Finally, Sergio Martino remade this episode in his *Ricchi, ricchissimi... praticamente in mutande* (1982), which offers the possibility to compare two different filmic approaches to the same story.

With its title, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* places itself in the Italian cinematographic tradition by referring to the nationally and internationally

acclaimed *Ieri, oggi, domani* (Vittorio De Sica, 1963). Marcello Mastroianni, also the protagonist in all episodes of the latter film, plays the protagonist of all three episodes in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, whereas his female counterparts are interpreted by three different women (Catherine Spaak, Virna Lisi, and Pamela Tiffin respectively). After *La dolce vita* (Federico Fellini, 1960) Mastroianni had become an international symbol of *italianità* and was described with the label of the Latin Lover.³⁸⁹ The female actresses, instead, have various backgrounds, as Spaak is French, Lisi Italian, and Tiffin American, further accentuating his *italianità*. Centralising Mastroianni, on the one hand, might suggest that women are interchangeable, emphasising a certain superiority, immutability, and fixedness of this male *divo*; A *New York Times* review of 1968 on the film suggests that Mastroianni ‘keeps appearing in bad sex farces’, describing *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* as ‘one of those sodden, gross off-color comedies that the Italians do so badly and export to us’, and arguing that the actresses are ‘misdirected’, ‘mis-made-up’, etc, strongly emphasizing Mastroianni’s acting talent and minimizing those of the actresses.³⁹⁰ On the other hand, this continuity brings to the fore the notion of mechanical elasticity: the *italiano medio* who is unable, or afraid, to change with his time: today, tomorrow, or the day after, he stays the same, which invites the viewers, in turn, to laugh at his inability to cope with socio-political changes.

³⁸⁹ Cfr. Jacqueline Reich, Catherine O’Rawe, ‘Marcello Mastroianni. Il divo come inetto’, in *Divi. La mascolinità nel cinema italiano* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2015), ebook version, Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover. Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

³⁹⁰ <<http://www.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A01E5D71330E034BC4850DFB1668383679EDE>> [accessed 16 October 2017].

Containing not only the intertext of *Ieri, Oggi, domani*, the particular structural characteristics of *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* bring to the fore a complexity of intratexts, as every episode can be approached as independent, and as interdependent.³⁹¹ As such, the film opens up a variety of possible connections, offering an open ending, and actively engaging the viewer. Finally, the title's reference to a specific time (today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow) suggests a reference to the world as it is, and how it might become, which reverberates comedy's contingency principle.

The first act displays the *italiano medio*'s obsessive need to distinguish himself from others, and is set in a typically *boom economico* environment. Originally intended as an entire feature film, *L'uomo dei 5 palloni* (30', written and directed by Marco Ferreri) is shot in black and white, accentuating the binary world view the Milanese protagonist Mario Fuggetta (Marcello Mastroianni) exhibits. The opening scene consists of a set of fixed frames of ca. one second each, and since it is presented as Mario's dream, we learn that we experience this story through his subjective experience, in POV shots. Mario finds himself in his factory, and continuously whispers 'la macchina' in the same pace as the sound of the machines, as though he becomes one with the machinery – someone working in the factory remarks that the machine moves 'like a human being'. Mario however, realises in an obsessive tone that the machine is not 'appunto': it

³⁹¹ For the notion of intertextuality, cfr. Julia Kristeva's famous essay 'Word, Dialogue, and Novel' of 1966, in which she asserts that '[a]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. In place of the notion of intersubjectivity that of intertextuality affirms itself and poetic language is read, at the very least, as a double.' Cfr. David Scott Diffrient, *Episodes and Infinities: Critical Approaches to Anthology, Omnibus, Portmanteau, and Sketch Films* (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, Film and Television, UCLA, 2005), p. 27.

produces eight objects less per minute than the maximum amount it is supposed to. An employee comments that the German counterparts of these machines do make that quota. Mario subsequently has an encounter with ‘l’uomo dei palloni’ with whom he discusses the possibility of fabricating and selling balloons.

When he wakes up in his apartment, a short visit from the son of the *portiere* who proudly shows Mario a large balloon, while Mario sticks a sharp object in it which makes it explode, highlights Mario’s frustrated nature. When his fiancée Giovanna (Catherine Spaak) enters the richly decorated, architectonically traditional house, he shows her his new suit, demonstrating his obsessive precision regarding not only the perfect functioning of his factory, but his personal material possessions – and his social status, and ‘masculinity’, too referring to the notion of *fare bella figura*: when a construction worker across the street waves at him, Mario orders him to go to work. Giovanna starts blowing up a balloon she finds around the house, but is unable to get any air inside. ‘Ragazzina’, Mario concludes with a patronising tone, telling her that she has to stand up straight and raise her shoulders.

Mario’s constant need to distinguish himself from other characters, be they female, a young boy, or lower-class, refer to theories on the performative nature of the notion of masculinity, therefore revealing its fragility. His behaviour precisely foregrounds his insecurities: his existence is validated through his superiority with regard to these other people.

Even though the couple demonstrate affection, talk, and make love, Mario becomes increasingly more distracted by the mathematical problem of exactly how much air fits into one balloon before it explodes. Much to Giovanna’s distress, he leaves the house in order to discuss with his engineer friend the

answer to this problem. When his friend is unable to provide the answer, Mario is desperate. He returns home, fights with Giovanna, she leaves him, he has one final extraordinarily expensive meal, and jumps out of his window, onto a car whose owner (Ugo Tognazzi) is merely preoccupied by the damage this deceased man has brought to his car.

The first scene in which Mario's increasing obsession is accentuated through threatening music, and a medium shot in chiaroscuro of him behind his desk while manically counting the amount of pumps, shows a large balloon onto which the word Italia is written in capitals (image 30). 'Con la pompa non si può sbagliare, perché è un fatto matematico! [...] È la stessa ragione per la quale i tedeschi vanno avanti: perché sono matematici!', he cries out to Giovanna, begging her to leave him alone. From the very first shots of his dream, it is clear that the Northern Italian magnate desperately seeks to compete, and identify, with the dominating Northern European technological imperium of Germany, literally and figuratively attempting to pump up 'Italy' with mathematical perfection. The *questione meridionale* is thus paralleled on a European level: Mario attempts to belong to the Italian, European, and global, North. His belief in technological progress furthermore echoes Futurist dogmatisms, often regarded as inspirational sources for the Fascist rhetoric.³⁹² The context of the rapidly changing Italian society of the *boom economico* in which Italy is pumped up with materialism (think of the man who is only preoccupied about his car) has dehumanised this character, which consequentially impacts the quality of his life – despite the fact

³⁹² Sandra Ponzanesi, 'Queering European Sexualities Through Italy's Fascist Past', in *What's Queer About Europe? Productive Encounters and Re-Enchanting Paradigms*, ed. Mireille Rosello, Sudeep Dasgupta (Fordham: Fordham University Press, 2014), pp. 81-90.

that he is an economically successful businessman. It ultimately leads to his death; in his eyes, he fails to belong to his imaginary of German perfection. Since he is unable to become part of his idea of 'the North', this episode accentuates Mario's in-between status in terms of North and South.

The second episode, *L'ora di punta* (20', written by Isabella Quarantotti and Eduardo De Filippo as a theatre play, and directed by the latter) starts with a shot on a Pan American airplane, as the Nobel Prize-nominated chemist Michele Profili (Marcello Mastroianni) steps out. After a one-month stay at a mental clinic, he is 'cured' from insomnia and from his tics. His childhood friend Arturo Rossi (Luciano Salce) picks him up, as Michele will spend the weekend in Rome at Arturo and his wife Dorotea's (Virna Lisi) house in the neighbourhood of E.U.R. During dinner, the couple have a fight, and to Michele's horror Arturo threatens his wife with a gun, chases her and Michele through the house, and shoots at her. When she faints, for a moment, Michele thinks that she has been murdered. His tics have returned, and in the evening, the occurrence repeats itself, with another chasing through the house. When Michele runs away in his pyjamas, Arturo follows him, explaining that there are no bullets in the pistol, but that he tells his wife otherwise to scare her. He explains that Dorotea has a particular 'caratterino', and that threatening her with a gun was the only way to keep the marriage going – his neighbours have adopted this particular habit. Michele applauds the idea, coming up with better chemical solutions for the bullets. The next day, Michele and Arturo drive through the neighbourhood, and hear a lot of gun shots – it is the time of day that the husbands go out, Arturo explains: 'l'ora di punta'. The last scene is a long shot on a wedding in front of the Basilica dei Santi Pietro e Paolo. The young husband is handed a gun by a child; all the men

start shooting their pistols in the sky, creating a symphony of loud gun shots (image 31).

As argued by Karen Pinkus, the acronym of E.U.R. (*Esposizione Universale Roma*) could be seen as miming symmetrically the acronym AOI, *l'Africa Orientale Italiana*. The location of the neighbourhood of E.U.R., in the south of Rome, was undeveloped (as Pinkus writes, unoccupied) until the late 1930s, and has a strong connection to Fascism, Italian colonialism, and the period of decolonisation. Its foundation was originally intended to celebrate the five-year anniversary of the occupation of Addis Ababa, but would later celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the march on Rome, in 1942. Because of the war, this celebration, and the finishing of the neighbourhood, did not take place. E.U.R. was fully completed in 1960, during the Olympics which were held in Rome that year. As demonstrated by Mia Fuller, a comparison between the intentions behind the city plan of Addis Ababa, AOI's capital, and that of E.U.R., reveals striking similarities:

The two plans were initially conceived at roughly the same time, and both were seen as opportunities to show fascist Italy in a prestigious light and present its modernity to other modern nations.³⁹³

The setting of this story in this particular neighbourhood, and ending in front of the distinctive Modernist church, is therefore particularly meaningful, both on a molecular level, and if we link it to the previous, and next acts of the film. E.U.R. as a newly occupied space, where the occupiers shoot each other on a regular basis, celebrating gun violence, recalls Wild West movies – emphasising on the

³⁹³ Mia Fuller, 'Wherever You Go, There You Are: Fascist Plans for the Colonial City of Addis Ababa and the Colonizing Suburb of EUR '42', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 31.2 (1996), pp. 397-418.

one hand Hollywood's impact on Italian cinemagoers, and on the other hand, the grotesque reality that would follow a displacement of such a story onto a Roman suburb. Similar to the plot of the next episode of this film, *La moglie bionda*, this American-like reality set in an Italian context accentuates therefore both the vicinity of American storytelling, and the sociocultural differences between Italy and the United States. Furthermore, the myth of the 'Wild West' in Hollywood cinema is often presented as the imaginary of an 'other' within, a lawless space, with porous boundaries, populated in part by Native-Americans, and lying in proximity to 'civilization', therefore revealing its fragility. This also brings to mind the spaghetti western genre, dating from a similar period, and known in Italy as 'western all'italiana'.³⁹⁴

L'ora di punta, just as *L'uomo dei 5 palloni*, furthermore recalls various – grotesquely exaggerated – facets of the presence of Fascism within the Italian society: the unbridled belief in technological progress, the aggressive occupation of space, and the suppression of people – women, the colonized, or people of lower classes. The tragic ending of Mario in *L'uomo dei 5 palloni* is not echoed in this episode, which ends instead with a grotesque portrayal of the suppression of women with violence in an historically loaded space, highlighting the intersectional nature of the notions of occupation and control from a Fascist and colonial perspective, and confirming once again the gendered characteristics of space in the *commedia all'italiana*, as this is constructed as a male space.

³⁹⁴ Cfr. Lee Broughton, 'Emancipation all'italiana: the Representation of African Americans in Italian Westerns', in *The Euro-Western: Reframing Gender, Race and the Other in Film* (London: Tauris, 2016), Simone Brioni, 'Transnationalism and nostalgia: Gianfranco Pannone's 'American Trilogy'', in *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 4.3 (2016) 403-419.

The third and final episode, *La moglie bionda* (written by Castellano, Pipolo, and Luciano Salce, directed by the latter) starts with a dream as well, demonstrating that the scenes are presented to the viewers in POV shots. Mario Gasparri (Marcello Mastroianni) finds himself with his American wife Pepita (Pamela Tiffin) in a large American convertible, which gets stuck in a narrow alley. Men arrive from all sides, as they watch Pepita who starts dancing on top of the car. The men get so close that they touch her. From their windows, people throw garbage onto Mario and Pepita. Mario starts screaming, and he wakes up in bed next to his wife in their house in E.U.R., Rome – this space loaded with references to imperial aspirations and the occupation of space, symbolising in this context an aspired superiority. When he leaves his house to go to work, he asks her for a kiss, but she answers that she needs financial support for all her beauty treatments. Hesitantly, he gives her the money, and walks away.

Mario works as a cashier at a bank, where his friend and colleague Rastrelli (Lelio Luttazzi) explains to him the meaning of his dream since he ‘has read Freud’: he calls it a transference, explains that Pepita and the car are one, and that, similar to a large American car, Pepita is very beautiful, but she takes up too much space, and consumes too much. Indeed, when an Arab prince arrives at the bank with five of his forty blonde women, Mario accurately calculates the large amount of money the prince will have to spend monthly to keep his women satisfied.

In the evening, Pepita offers Mario not a freshly prepared meal but two cans with two different types of *primi*, – ‘original’, Mario concludes awkwardly. After dinner, she takes Mario’s plastic fork and knife, his placemat, and his plate, and throws it over the edge of the balcony. All of this further emphasizes Pepita’s

americanità as opposed to the *italianità* of Mario, who is bewildered by some of Pepita's life style choices. When Pepita goes inside, Mario complains to his neighbour on the adjacent terrace that he is tired, while his wife desires to make love every evening; his neighbour admits to having the same problem.

Since Pepita has read in the newspaper that the Arab prince travels the world in search for the most beautiful blonde women to add to his harem, and that he pays a lot of money for them, Mario therefore decides to try and sell his wife. He meets the Arab prince the next day at his hotel, and tells the latter that he would like to demonstrate him 'qualcosa che credo potrà interessarla'. He shows the prince many pictures of his wife, with for the viewer comical titles such as 'Pepita, sogno d'oriente', 'Pepita col sombrero', and 'Pepita, rivoluzione francese'. The prince already possesses what he describes as 'un articolo' like Pepita, and advises Mario to go and visit a friend of his – 'Fino a laggiù in Africa. Lo sapevo io che era una pazzia', an annoyed Mario concludes.

They go anyway: Mario tells his wife that they are on a business trip for the bank. A camel ride through the desert, fellow travellers who stop in the middle of their trip to pray, palm trees, spicy food, and belly dancing women, are the cinematographic signs of this 'different' culture, reflecting Mario's imaginaries of other cultures while photographing Pepita as, for instance, 'sogno d'oriente'. After a visit at a harem whose owner is not willing to pay in cash, Mario and Pepita travel through the desert for two more weeks, and finally arrive in a Bedouin camp. Just before closing the deal of selling Pepita to a local harem owner, Mario's prospective jewels and golden coins are thrown back in the treasure room where they came from: Mario is captured in turn, as Pepita has sold him to a harem of men to be used sexually by other men.

The previous two episodes of the film indicate Marcello Mastroianni's characters' need to oppress people, and their obsession with obtaining a position of superiority, in order to establish their own identity. In both episodes, the characters are in search for certainties; in *L'uomo dei 5 palloni* of a mathematical and technological character, and in *L'ora di punta* of a social and technological nature. In *La moglie bionda*, on the other hand, Mario's inability to occupy any position of superiority is accentuated on several levels; all certainties Mastroianni's characters might have had in the previous episodes, are stripped away from him. In his dream, he is threatened by men who are attracted to, and aggressively touch – dominate – Pepita, as though he were unable to keep her 'in control'. From his perspective, he indeed fails both economically and physically to successfully keep the marriage going. When he goes to 'Africa', a continent which, due to Italy's never nationally negated imperial narrative, lends itself to projections of inferiority from Mario's perspective (see also below), he is the one who is physically, economically, and emotionally, oppressed. He is indeed inept at achieving all goals he sets himself, embodying Reich's idea of the *inetto*.

Pepita, who in this analogy is 'the stranger' in as much as she is not male like Mario and his business partners, talks enthusiastically with her husband during dinner, demonstrates genuine care for Mario's health when he nearly faints of the heat in the desert, and is always willing to make love to him, but Mario treats her purely as a commodity, describing her as 'una cosa' and 'un articolo' – Marx's notion of commodity fetishism literally turned into a human being. The principle of 'stranger fetishism' is here displayed through the comedic approach of the grotesque.

This brings us to the layered depiction of the imaginary of the Black Other in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*. The only positive feature Mario attributes to his wife, is her physical appearance. ‘Tu, attenta a non prendere tanto sole in faccia, che poi ti abbronzii!’, he tells Pepita when they arrive in the desert. During their visit at the first harem, Pepita arrives at dinner with a hat on. When she takes it off, she seems to have a darker hair colour. The music stops, and people around the table sigh with horror. Mario is captured, and threatened to be beheaded. When Mario demonstrates that it is ‘merely a wig’, they are saved. Her bloneness, and whiteness, are considered a currency – from his perspective, as his currency. ‘The identification of women with whiteness, and men as searchers after whiteness, is central to the construction of skin white people’, which in turn is strongly connected to Christian imagery. Mario’s coupling with this blonde woman thus emphasises his whiteness, and offers him a sense of belonging, or superiority. However, since the non-white men presented in this film are also looking for white (blonde) women, the distance between Mario and them diminishes.

While complaining to his neighbour about Pepita’s sexual drive, Mario describes how she eats her hair in order to demonstrate her libido (which combines two tropes of the carnivalesque). Seconds afterwards, a shot from frog-eye perspective on Pepita who stands on her bed, and indeed, eats her hair, proves Mario’s point (1.01.12, image 32). Slowly walking to the bedroom, he obeys reluctantly. The following shot is on Pepita as well, but this time we look down on her, while an Orientalist melody accompanies the scene (1.01.19, image 33). Mario has brought her to a professional photographer as soon as he decided to sell her – he tells her the photos are needed for her driver’s license, but in

reality, he wants to use them as publicity photos for Pepita's potential buyers. Whereas in the previous shot, Pepita was looking down on the camera, moving joyfully, and demonstrating her sense of agency to choose to be desired, in this shot, she is demure, uncomfortable, and dressed in an exotic-erotic bikini with see-through silver veils surrounding her, while she lays on a piece of cloth with a leopard print. Mario tells her how to move, how to look at the camera, what to dress, what to think. In this setting, she is presented more than at any other point in the film as a commodity. Her agency is stripped away from her, whereas he seems in charge: her costumes as exotic Other facilitate his looking down on her, since they frame her as a 'stranger' in Puwar's terms.

The costumes (masks) Mario chooses for her in order to come across as desirable, are almost exclusively Orientalist and racist depictions of other cultures (images 34, 1.02.40, and 35, 1.03.00).³⁹⁵ He asks her to play 'la tigressa', to hide her body behind a sombrero, and to dance the hula while dressed in traditional Hawaiian dress. Mario orders her around more aggressively with every new take, keeps making the money sign with his hands, and when he asks her to do *l'indiana*, he makes gestures of a dancing woman while pretending to play a flute – alluding to the possibility of embodying an Orientalist woman, as well, in a sense, predicting his loss of identity which is to follow. During the last photo session, a close-up on him with his hands making a money gesture, while staring into the camera with a cold, and focused, gaze, and accompanied by surrealistic and somewhat threatening music typical for composer Nino Rota,³⁹⁶ underlines

³⁹⁵ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

³⁹⁶ For more on Nino Rota, cfr. Franco Sciannameo, *Nino Rota, Federico Fellini, and the Making of an Italian Cinematic Folk Opera* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

not only Mario's obsession with money, but moreover his desperate need for erotic exotic projections onto cultures other than, and inferior to, the Italian one – she is not asked to 'do' *l'italiana*. Through imagining her as Oriental, Black, Other, - imaging Blackness - he can feel in control once again.³⁹⁷

However, Pepita remains blonde, accentuating the superficial, and grotesque, qualities of framing her as these various stereotypes: from the perspective of the characters, her whiteness is never in danger of losing its power or appeal, even when Mario attempts to frame her as anything else. From the perspective of this study, and taking into account the previous episodes of this film, a realisation of this could see the *italiano medio* Mario in an uncomfortable position of not-belonging, and of uncertainties.

The first film of this corpus in which the protagonists go to Africa, Mario's presence there could potentially reinforce his lost sense of superiority/whiteness due to his separation from his white wife, in as much as he will be able to find his interpretation of the imaginary of Black Others, contrastable to his white self-image: '[in the Italian context,] blackness always elicits a gaze; a black body is *black* before it is anything else (gendered, clothed, still or in motion, old or young, African or Western, and so on).'³⁹⁸ In Mario's

³⁹⁷ With the notion of Imaging Blackness, I refer to Audrey T. McCluskey, *Imaging Blackness: Race and Racial Representation in Film Poster Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

³⁹⁸ Karen Pinkus, 'Shades of Black in Advertising and Popular Culture', *Revisioning Italy. National Identity and Global Culture*, ed. Beverly Allen, Mary Russo (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 134-55 (p. 134). Cfr. Norma Bouchard, 'Reading the Discourse of Multicultural Italy: Promises and Challenges of Transnational Italy in an Era of Global Migration', in *Italian Culture*, vol. Xxviii, no. 2, 2010, pp. 104-120.

case, the opposite will come true, as he will become the object of the gaze of the African people he encounters.

His assumption ('lo sapevo io che era una pazzia') of Africa as a 'chaotic' place is a first indication of his prejudices. The first harem owner Mario and Pepita visit, is a stereotypical portrayal of 'lo straniero come nemico e «barbaro» da cui ci si voleva distinguere'.³⁹⁹ He treats his staff terribly, and demands to behead a man who brought a 'fake blonde' to his harem, together with the 'fake blonde' in question. When Mario does not agree about a possible payment for Pepita, the couple has to run away from the place in order not to get killed. The clothes of most men and women Mario and Pepita encounter in 'Africa' frame the characters as non-Italians. The Moorish architecture, gardens, and the desert, further frame the setting of the story cinematographically as other-than-Italian: 'è arredato tutto in stile arabo, hai visto?', Pepita asks Mario when she arrives in the dinner courtyard, pointing out on a meta-level the inauthenticity, and the theatrical depiction, of this non-Italian culture. This, together with her putting on a wig, suggests her knowing more than she is showing at this point in the film. As I argue below, Pepita will emerge as the fulcrum of the critique of Mario's white, male, *italianità*, and as the agent of deconstruction of his presumed truths.

When we compare the POV shots of *La moglie bionda* to the same story told through an objective camera perspective of the film *Ricchi, ricchissimi... Praticamente in mutande* (Sergio Martino, 1983, from hereon *Ricchi, ricchissimi*), of which the last episode is a slight alteration of the same screenplay, the significance of Mario's subjective perspective becomes even clearer. In *Ricchi, ricchissimi*, the episode is framed as a court case, where factory owner Alberto

³⁹⁹ Silvana Patriarca, *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Rome, Bari: Laterza, 2010), ebook.

Del Prà (Renato Pozzetto) recounts the story of trying to cut a deal with a rich Arab man, supposing the latter wants to sleep with his wife, but figuring out too late that in reality, he has to do with a harem existing of merely men. He is captured and raped, which is to be concluded from his damaged back while being in the courtroom. However, they settle in court, as Alberto is proposed a large deal. *Ricchi, ricchissimi* displays a stereotypical depiction of ‘Arabs’ (one character is described as ‘di nazionalità araba’ by the judge) as they are constantly accompanied by Orientalist music, have high pitched voices, and follow Alberto’s sudden instigation of praying in the middle of the day on the ground of the factory terrain simply because Alberto has to keep them busy. This racist depiction offers no meta-perspective through which viewers are invited to reflect on the absurdity of the depiction; the Arab characters thus become the objects of the viewers’ gazes, and of their laughter. Alberto, moreover, still wins the case, and as such does not incorporate the loser protagonist typical for the *commedia all’italiana*, contrary to what happens to Mario in Salce’s *La moglie bionda*. Instead of a filmic fetish for other cultures, as we can see in *Ricchi, ricchissimi*, Mario tries to stranger fetishize, but in the end, he is the object of fetishism himself within the film, and of the viewer’s laughter from a meta-perspective.

The contrast between Mario’s skin tone and that of his potential business partners is not very clear. Moreover, the contrast between his skin tone and some ‘Africans’ is as high as that between his and that of Pepita, placing him somewhere in-between. The hierarchy of skin tone is very present in ‘Africa’ as well, as the harem owners have a lighter skin than their servants, and the desirable and expensive women that are part of the harems are all natural blondes. This paradox of on the one hand a reinforcement of the binary of Black and white, and

on the other hand the consequence of Mario therefore seeming less white is an indication of the falling to pieces of the ‘certainties’ of the hierarchical social order stemming from the colonial era and the imperial narrative. Through the mechanical elasticity typical for a comedy, however, Mario holds on to his ‘beliefs’, failing to see the signs of losing the control which his privilege of being ‘Italian’ has long offered him. ‘Voglio il console!’, he screams while he is taken away by his future harem owner, but no-one is there to save him. Again, this points out his presumed privilege, assuming he will find a way out of this situation.

Despite the necessity of the imaginary of the Black Other for the sanity of the *italiano medio* Mario, no character in ‘Africa’ is willing, nor able, to fill this void. The life at the harem and Bedouin camps show a multi-ethnic, and multi-layered society, still based on racism, but Mario does not stand at the top of the skin-tone hierarchy. Therefore, this film illustrates the real crisis of the very principle of the Black Other as an outsider.

Mario consequentially seeks to establish his presumed *italianità* as superior, using a specific, and familiar, set of tools in order to differentiate himself from the people they encounter, less focussed on skin tone. The tropes of the *commedia all’italiana* come into play in order for him to depend on an imaginary of a superior *italianità*. Catholicism is part of his identity, and therefore, he deeply fears homosexuality, considered a crime during Fascism, and during the release of the film, according to the Catholic Church as well.⁴⁰⁰ This explains why the male

⁴⁰⁰ Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities, Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p.

19. Cfr. Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Queering European Sexualities Through Italy’s Fascist Past: Colonialism, Homosexuality, and Masculinities’, in *What’s Queer about Europe? Productive Encounters and Re-*

harem members are depicted from the POV of Mario in a stereotypical manner, since they all have high-pitched voices, display effeminate mannerisms, and whisper softly when Mario arrives. In an earlier moment in the film, Mario fails at his attempt to ridicule non-Catholicism – ‘hai visto quelli?’, he asks Pepita laughingly when their fellow travellers get out of the bus in the middle of the desert in order to pray. She is not impressed, nor surprised, again alluding to her control over the situation.

The same counts for food: while Mario is unable to eat the spicy food they are offered at the first harem they stop, Pepita enjoys it, as do all other people present, of all kinds of cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Mario looks down on Pepita’s lack of cooking skills, differentiating himself from the American woman, as well. With his perfectly tailored suits, and his gallant behaviour to all people he meets, Mario constantly *fa bella figura*. This is contrasted to the first harem owner they encounter, but even the narrative of the ‘barbaro’ results to be a misinformed stereotype when Mario meets with the second harem owner in the Bedouin camp, who is a perfect gentleman in a Western suit. Finally, his *romanità* (living in the historically loaded E.U.R.) offers him no solutions here.

But all these aspects through which he could self-identify as superior do not offer him any advantages in the African context. His attempt to frame others first manifests itself in a failed oppression of his wife, and later, in an attempt to dissociate himself from the ‘Africans’ he encounters, by framing them as barbari, pointing out ‘strange habits’, and by his costumes and behaviour. However,

towards the end of the film, the cinematographic act of framing will come to underline Mario's inferiority.

During their visit in Africa from the very first encounter with the harem owner, Mario is positioned lower in the frame than Pepita's potential buyer. The former kneels down, while the harem owner sits on a throne, surrounded by his blonde wives (1.09.41, image 36). When they are sitting behind the dinner table, Mario is constantly positioned slightly lower in the frame as well. When Pepita and Mario arrive at the Bedouin camp, Mario immediately pays a visit to the tent of the male harem, assuming he could sell Pepita to this harem owner. The first shot inside the tent is on Mario sitting on a chair, while the veiled men, whom Mario thinks are women, walk inside, towering over him, and surrounding him from all sides (1.24.09, image 37). When Mario is allowed to show the harem owner his pictures of Pepita, he is again kneeled in front of the harem owner, much lower in the frame than the others (1.24.47, image 38). He does not notice that the harem members are men until they remove their veils – their masks of 'femaleness'. In this moment, he notices that everyone around him is observing him from a higher perspective. While he gets once more surrounded by the men, he pushes his way through them to get outside, while an older man looks at this scene through a frame of drapes from outside of the tent, laughing at Mario (1.26.00, image 39); the latter slowly becomes the spectacle for the African people, as he already was for the viewers of the film. Mario manages to escape this time, but is utterly confused and scared because of this, to him unknown, position of being perceived as 'dominatable', and as the object of someone's gaze.

After Mario is taken by the guards to become part of this male harem despite his unwillingness, the other harem owner stares at him going away,

through a door frame with Orientalist ornaments. A zoom-in shows predominantly his eye, focusing on Mario, and the man slowly closes the frame, refusing Mario, and the viewer, to be framed as 'Oriental', or 'Black'. This man closes the Orientalist frame once and for all (1.30.28, image 40, 1.30.31, image 41).

Two out of three episodes of the film *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* begin with a dream that foretells the future of the protagonists: they will no longer occupy a safe, or certain, space. In *La moglie bionda*, Freud is explicitly mentioned in reference to these dreams. This points out the themes of the unconscious, hidden desires, memories, and traumas; if we take into account the themes of all three episodes of this *commedia all'italiana*, this leads us to Fascism and colonialism, since all three episodes deal with the occupation of space, and the suppression of other people (be they of a different gender, class, or race). Specifically, the film illustrates an interesting shift, both geographically and figuratively, of the position of the *italiano medio* in the racialized and gendered context he finds himself in, and touches upon the topics of colonizing, the occupation of space, and the domination of people from an intersectional perspective; the suppression and physical domination of women (Dorotea and Giovanna, and most of all, Pepita) is interrelated with the suppression and occupation of space belonging to others (E.U.R., 'Africa').

Female whiteness continues to represent a desirable, and essential, element of support for protagonists to perform their imaginary of *italianità*. Mario's desired blonde wife reinforces the binary of Black and white. Once the two separate in 'Africa', this same reinforced binary weakens Mario's position within the racialized system, leaving him with no certainties; above, I describe this as the stronger-weaker paradox. Mario is to be found somewhere in-between, and

outside of this system, incorporating Puwar's notion of the body out of place; the externalization of the Black Other becomes gradually more difficult even from a micro-perspective. Pepita uses Mario's inability to recognise her intelligence in order to take control over the situation.

Considering the geographical settings of the plots, the first episode is set in Milan, in a rather traditional Italian neighbourhood. Here, the protagonist fails to obtain a sense of belonging to the North. The second episode is set in E.U.R., where the comedic approach of the grotesque points out the absurdity of a Wild West scenario in Rome, alluding to the 'failed' Italian colonial enterprises. The third episode, finally, is set even more southwards: in 'Africa'. There, too, however, the *italiano medio* fails to occupy a position of superiority, of belonging to the North, of seeming white, of being the observer, instead of the observed. To refer to Puwar again, the Italian is constructed out of the space of 'Northern Europe', and out of the space of 'Africa'.⁴⁰¹

The episodes set in Italy thematically refer to national forces from outside; in *L'uomo dei 5 palloni*, to Germany, and in *L'ora di punta*, to the United States. Contrasting these 'stronger' identities and nation states to the Italian characters on various levels, weakens the position of the *italiano medio* in a global context.

The Black Other – the racial trope of the Arab, as described by Gilroy – appearing in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* is verbal, and displays a sense of agency more so than the *italiano medio* characters. This marks a significant shift in the depiction of Black Otherness as discussed in this study. These characters, moreover, more explicitly point out the grotesque behaviour of the *italiano medio* who is in need of an Other in order to establish his own identity. The filmic act of

⁴⁰¹ Nirmal Puwar, *Space Invaders. Race, Gender and Bodies Out of Place* (New York: Berg, 2004), p. 1.

framing functions as a metaphor for projecting in the Freudian sense, and offers insights into racializing discourses, which in the case of *italianità*, fail to prevail. The *italiano medio* is portrayed as not only an *inetto*, but moreover as an outsider. As such, the film criticizes or questions the notions of the Black Other and *italianità*, and comments on the simplification and slipperiness of the binary of white and Black. Mario is a victim of his own ignorance, mechanical elasticity, and insensitivity towards all kinds of Others; but they (Pepita and the Arab people they encounter) know him well.

The very last shot of the film shows Marcello Mastroianni (the international divo) dressed up in Oriental drag, running behind his wife's very expensive car, and begging her to stop (image 42). As Fullwood argues, cars appear everywhere in the *commedia all'italiana*, 'and when they do, issues of gender are not far behind. Images of cars proliferate in the genre as key elements of narrative, character construction, and cinematic style.'⁴⁰² Associating the car with male sexuality and power, she refers to a quote in *I motorizzati* (Camillo Mastrocinque, 1962), 'the car makes the man'. The shot in which we see Pepita contently gazing through her window frame onto Mario (image 43) both reconsiders the notion of framing as she is framed all throughout the film but uses it as a tool in order to get things her way (similar to the dancers in *Il moralista*), and destabilises the gendered association with cars and male sexuality.

Mario is captured by his own imaginary of an exotified-eroticized otherness (images 44 and 45), literally, through being captured by them, and figuratively, through wearing these clothes.

⁴⁰² Natalie Fullwood, *Cinema, Gender, and Everyday Space* (2016), p. 129.

Images



30 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (13.14, *L'uomo dei 5 palloni*, Marco Ferreri)



31 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (50.18, *L'ora di punta*, Eduardo De Filippo)



32 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.01.12, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



33 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.01.19, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



34 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.02.40, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



35 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.03.00, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



36 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.09.41, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



37 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.24.09, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



38 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.24.47, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



39 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.26.00, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



40 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.30.29, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



41 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.30.31, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



42 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.32.12, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



43 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.31.45, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



44 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.32.08, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)



45 Still *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* (1.32.16, *La moglie bionda*, Luciano Salce)

6 “L’illuminazione dal dubbio” in *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l’amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?*

Benedict Anderson describes the modern nation state – ‘artefacts of a particular kind’ – as an imagined political community, since the abstract concept of the nation state is always interpreted as a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ (community), and while it is impossible even for the members of the smallest nation state to personally know the majority of their fellow-country wo/men, ‘in the midst of each lives the image of their communion’ (imagined).⁴⁰³ *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l’amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (directed by Ettore Scola, written by Age, Furio Scarpelli, and Ettore Scola, 1968; from hereon, *Riusciranno?*) illustrates the imagined aspect of this sense of community, by bringing protagonists Fausto and Ubaldo outside of their comfortable Italy - outside of Rome, more precisely - and into ‘Africa’ - more specifically, to Angola - where the *italiani medi* become the object of the gaze of the Luandan man they encounter immediately upon their arrival in Angola, even though Fausto continuously seeks to frame the Angolans he meets. Moreover, in *Riusciranno?*, Italian characters are able to become part of the community of their interpretation of Black Others in Angola. In a sense, therefore, the construction of *italianità* as opposed to a Black Otherness is presented more explicitly than in the previous films as a fictive imaginary, which even the racializing protagonist, *italiano medio* Fausto Di Salvio (Alberto Sordi) is forced to admit towards the end of the film: Scola describes Fausto’s final realisation as ‘l’imprevedibile conquista di un

⁴⁰³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, repr. 2006), pp. 6-7.

personaggio che per la prima volta è illuminato dal dubbio'.⁴⁰⁴

Whereas there are structural similarities between *Riusciranno?* and *Oggi, domani, dopodomani* and *Riusciranno?*, the tradition in which the film discussed in this chapter can be placed differs from that of the *film a episodi*. *Riusciranno?* contains transmedial intertexts, and is based partly on Jules Verne's and Emilio Salgari's adventure novels, centring around two protagonists who experience one adventure after the other. Moreover, the cartoonish depiction of many characters, together with the cinematography, such as panoramic shots from far away and extreme close-ups (see the images belonging to this chapter) allude to the genre of the comic book, a genre that Scola was familiar with since he, just as Federico Fellini a few years before him, had been part of the *Marc 'Aurelio* crew of cartoonists; While recalling his sources of inspiration for the film, Scola refers specifically to the comic books *Cino e Franco*, and *L'Uomo Mascherato*.⁴⁰⁵ This echoes the trope of Africa as a place of adventure; 'il continente nero' si configura come sfondo idilliaco o, al contrario, come luogo dell'orrore, ma in ogni caso come regno della natura e di una non-Storia,' underlining a colonial perspective on the continent as a whole.⁴⁰⁶ This is further emphasised by the fact that there are documentary elements in the film, as well: *Riusciranno?* includes imagery of the Angolan savanna, wild animals, and locals passing by.

The film, therefore, complicates even the question of who is ethnologized, observed, and subjectified, since the *commedia all'italiana* stereotypes and

⁴⁰⁴ Ettore Scola, *Il cinema e io. Conversazione con Antonio Bertini* (Rome: Officina Edizioni, 1996), p. 85.

⁴⁰⁵ Ettore Scola, *Il cinema e io* (1996), pp. 85-86.

⁴⁰⁶ Maria Coletti, 'Alla ricerca dell'innocenza perduta. "Riusciranno I nostri eroi...?"', in *Trevico – Cinecittà. L'avventuroso viaggio di Ettore Scola*, ed. by Vito Zaggarro (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), pp. 184-190 (p. 187).

subjectifies *italianità* and the *italiano medio*, whereas these characters are in a country which traditionally is ethnologized. The setting of the film in Angola, at that time still colonised by the Portuguese, fits this narrative. Simultaneously, it enables a dissociation from Italian colonialism by focusing on the Portuguese, and, therefore, a reinforcement of the myth of the *italiani brava gente*; Scola argued, '[p]referii l'Angola, perché in questa colonia portoghese il colonialismo manteneva forme sottili di razzismo e prevaricazione.'⁴⁰⁷ Merely five years before the filming of *Riusciranno?*, which was done predominantly in 1965, Somalia had become independent from Italy.⁴⁰⁸ Similar to *La battaglia di Algeri* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), the most famous Italian film about colonisation, which discusses the French colonisation in Algeria, the setting of *Riusciranno?* in Angola therefore points to a displacement of the Italian colonial history. However, subtler references to the specific Italian case of colonialism are woven through the story line of the film.

In *Riusciranno?*, Fausto Di Salvio (Alberto Sordi), a well-to-do Roman publisher of inexpensive books, and a stereotypical product of the *boom economico*, assigns his accountant Ubaldo (Bernard Blier) to join him on a trip to Angola, officially with the aim of finding his brother-in-law Oreste Sabatini, called Titino (Nino Manfredi) who has disappeared in Angola, but in reality in order to 'consume Africa' as a modern tourist: to liberate himself temporarily

⁴⁰⁷ Ettore Scola, *Il cinema e io* (1996), p. 84.

⁴⁰⁸ Cfr. Robert L. Hess, *Italian Colonialism in Somalia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966); Richard Bennett Furlow, *The Spectre of Colony: Colonialism, Islamism, and State in Somalia* (PhD, Arizona State University, 2013), part. pp. 46-66; Paolo Tripodi, 'Back to the Horn: Italian Administration and Somalia's Troubled Independence', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 32 No. 2/3 (1999).

from his own limited frame of Rome, and instead to frame the people and things he encounters through his video camera literally, and through his encyclopaedic knowledge metaphorically.⁴⁰⁹ His strong belief in technology (cameras, recording machines, etc) becomes the key for understanding Fausto's behaviour. Not only is it a self-reflexive comment on the act of filmmaking in general, and Scola's expedition to Angola in order to make this film in particular – this machinery also functions as weapons for Fausto, as he forcefully attempts to objectify and categorise other people, while he himself is terrified of the idea of being framed. The war analogy is also recognizable in Fausto's remark at the end of the film that Titino has 'bruciato mezz' Africa' - the latter has left behind friends who thought he had died, armies without their promised weapons, and unfinished businesses.

The background of the opening credits consists of illustrations originally published in the French translation of Henry M. Stanley's *How I Found Livingstone* of 1876, and a French translation of 1877 of *Livingstone's Travels* by David Livingstone, and they consist of a juxtaposition of African 'natives', and colonisers with a much lighter skin tone observing them.⁴¹⁰ The African characters are scarcely dressed, dance, work the fields, fight animals, and are in constant movement, whereas the colonisers are dressed in uniforms, are ornamented with weapons, umbrella's, hats, and tools, and pose statically. A picture of immensely high trees with, on the bottom, tiny human figures, is juxtaposed to an illustration of an enormous ship, which dwarfs figures on the bottom of the drawing just as much (images 46-50). Seemingly untameable nature

⁴⁰⁹ Maria Coletti, 'Alla ricerca dell'innocenza perduta (2002), p. 187, Ettore Scola, *Il cinema e io* (1996). p. 85.

⁴¹⁰ Ennio Bispuri, *Ettore Scola, un umanista nel cinema italiano* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2006), pp. 182-83.

versus technological progress; ‘wild’ people versus ‘cultured’ ones: these nineteenth century book illustrations can be found at the core of *Riusciranno?*’s protagonists’ view of ‘Africa’ – a plot which is set in the middle of the twentieth century, which underlines his mechanical elasticity.

The opening credits connect to the opening scene, in which Fausto sits in his Rolls Royce, making plans for the week, assisted by Ubaldo: the first shot is directed through the car onto the Roman *Altare della Patria*, a monument in celebration of the Italian nation state, and also the background for Mussolini’s speech of 9 May 1936 in which he declared the birth of the Empire (image 52). The car drives through the *Via dei fori imperiali* – indicating constant references to Italy’s colonial past; even though the plot of the film will not take place in any of Italy’s former colonies, it starts in Rome loaded with imperial symbolism (one has to think only of the maps Mussolini had put up on the walls along the *Via dei fori imperiali* which show how Rome will once again conquer the world), and references to an unresolved past - a past which brought to the fore certain narratives in which the protagonists of *Riusciranno?* continue to believe.

After having decided to go and look for Titino, Fausto and Ubaldo arrive in Angola. Immediately upon his arrival, Fausto incorporates the ‘different body’ Nirmal Puwar describes in the context of Western nation states since in this context, he is not the somatic norm. When he steps out of the bus close to Luanda’s airport, he is dressed similarly to the colonisers in the drawings of the opening credits (images 50, 51): In a safari outfit, with many ‘weapons’, including two cameras, a large gun and a small pistol, a water bottle, and a safari hat. However, instead of a background of untameable nature, the environment he finds himself in is a modern city with a skyline of skyscrapers along the sea, making

him seem even more out of place. While he immediately starts to film the people he encounters (13.05, image 53) they do not show any similarities to the African characters in the book illustrations of the opening credits other than their skin tone. When Fausto turns around, he sees a man with a dark skin tone dressed in a modern suit, filming and framing, 'shooting', Fausto (14.16, image 51). The latter becomes visibly uncomfortable and confused, illustrating his automatic assumption of being the norm, and not the exception - revealing his mechanical elasticity. He yells at Ubaldo, 'ragioniere! Prenda qualcosa anche lei, non mi faccia portare tutto a me! Non vede che mi fanno il filmetto? Hanno ragione!' (image 54, 14.21). 'Hanno ragione, sì!', Ubaldo responds indicating that the our gazes should indeed be directed towards Fausto. In fact, while searching actively for an other in order to feel superior, knowledgeable, and adventurous, he will become objectified by the Africans he encounters, who in turn become the Other in whose gaze Fausto gains existence (image 55).

Throughout the film, Ubaldo and Fausto will represent two different approaches to the colonial imaginary of Africa: Fausto symbolises the abovementioned idyllic, romantic approach to 'il continente nero', whereas Ubaldo will continue to consider Angola as a 'luogo dell'orrore' – he cannot wait to go back home to watch a football game of his club *Roma*. In both cases, apartheid 'Africa' is considered 'regno della natura e di una non-Storia', as the two characters represent two sides of the same coin. Titino on the other hand, will turn out to represent the active entrepreneur/coloniser, who has a much more (inter-) active role in his adventures in Angola, and who will also embody the shift of the racialized gaze. However, since his actions and behaviour are contrasted to the seemingly harsher and more organised Portuguese and Belgian

colonisers the protagonists encounter, Titino represents specifically the ‘Italian coloniser’, as the opening shot on the *Altare della patria* illustrates as well.

On many other occasions, Fausto attempts to differentiate himself from African people he meets. During the first part of their adventure, ‘our heroes’ hire a jeep and a Portuguese driver, Durabal, and when they stop to fix a technical problem with the car in a seemingly desolated place, Fausto decides to film the fauna. Out of the blue, he sees a man behind a tree: ‘il nostro primo autentico aborigena!’, he utters enthusiastically, treating the man as a commodity he can now scrap from his list of ‘things to do/see’. When he asks Durabal to translate to the man that all men are brothers, Durabal refuses, saying he is no brother of ‘il negro’. ‘Non è fratello del pigmeo? Allora non è neanche fratello mio! E mi fa [male] che sei compatriota di Yanez!’, responds Fausto. He fires Durabal, and leaves him behind in what to him seems the middle of nowhere. The latter, however, grabs an electric scooter, and drives off.

First of all, Fausto categorises the man he has just encountered, similarly to the plant, without knowing whether he actually belongs to the ethnic group of the Pygmy people, illustrating his racist, and objectifying, tendencies. Referring to Yanez de Gomera, the Portuguese friend of Sandokan, Fausto demonstrates moreover that for him, the line is blurred between fictional sources and ‘scientific’ ones in order to grasp situations or places. Malaysian pirate Sandokan is the protagonist of the adventure novels written by Emilio Salgari in the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The immensely popular stories describe Sandokan’s travels through, among other places, the Antilles, the ‘Far West’, India, and ‘Africa’. The books were transported into the medium of film, resulting in a large number of (Italian and international) film adaptations from 1920 onwards, with a clearly Orientalist subtext. However, their

worst enemy is a white Englishman, presented as the evil colonizer. Indeed, from the perspective of the protagonists of *Riusciranno*, the Portuguese colonisers function as the English in Sandokan stories: contrasting figures to the Italians, who are, in the end, *brava gente*.

(In what sense or capacity) Does Fausto, representing the *italiano medio*, feel like a brother to ‘the Pygmy’? He dissociates himself from the Portuguese man without any hesitation or embarrassment, implying he is doing ‘the right thing’ – performing a sense of ‘moralismo’ not dissimilar to the protagonist in *Il moralista* (chapter four), as Fausto does not feel like a ‘brother to the Pygmy’. Instead, he dissociates himself from the openly racist Portuguese man in order to reaffirm the myth of the *italiani brava gente*, nevertheless labelling all Black Angolans he encounters, depending on their gender, with the tropes of ‘noble savages’ or ‘Black Venusses’ – and calling them ‘Pygmies’ without knowing whether they actually belong to this ethnic group.⁴¹¹ He moreover repeatedly refers to himself as a ‘uomo bianco’. This condescending and racializing behaviour towards the Angolans stems from the imperial narrative, Salgari’s novels, and comic books, according to which Italians were superior to the therefore ‘colonizable’ people.⁴¹² Towards the end of the film, when he is irritated by a Portuguese friend, he cries out ‘vergognatevi stranieri, approfittate sempre degli italiani!’, using this xenophobic attitude when he needs to without hesitation.

⁴¹¹ Cfr. Sandra Ponzanesi, ‘Beyond the Black Venus: Colonial Sexual Politics and Contemporary Visual Practices’, in Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, pp. 165-89.

⁴¹² Cfr. Ettore Scola’s *Una giornata particolare*’s example of the comic book *Nel regno dei pigmei*, as discussed in chapter one.

But it is Fausto who will be observed as a curiosity, as a foreigner, and as a commodity. An illustration of this is the scene in which Fausto and Ubaldo arrive at a Christian camp, where they find out that Titino has been a priest. Fausto doubts Titino's original intentions, since there is a young woman in the camp, sister Maria Carmen, who describes how Titino converted her to Christianity. Thinking Titino attempted to get close to her by pretending to be a priest, Fausto automatically assumes this woman with a darker skin used to be a prostitute, associating sex with degeneration and Blackness; Danielle Hipkins describes how in immediate post-World War II Italian cinema, 'the prostitute body became a physical point of contact, or border between Italians and the occupier/liberator body, and as such an obvious 'borderline' identity onto whom to project guilt'.⁴¹³ This degenerating imaginary, combined with her Blackness, makes Fausto treat this sister as a commodity.

Based on personal accounts, foto's, illustrations, and other texts of the imperial period, we can conclude that the Black woman as an erotic commodity was indeed a trope, and the norm. Mabrat Kassa, for instance, an Eritrean woman who was living in Asmara in her early teens in 1935, stated in an interview in the late 1980s that the Italian men commonly raped Eritrean women, and that she (and others) hated them for it.⁴¹⁴ But in *Riusciranno*, Fausto goes over to sister Maria Carmen's bedroom that same evening, asking her if he may come in, since he wants to ask her some questions about Titino (image 56). She lets him in, closes

⁴¹³ Danielle Hipkins, *Italy's Other Women. Gender and Prostitution in Italian Cinema, 1940-1965* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 73.

⁴¹⁴ Amrit Wilson, *The Challenge Road: Women and the Eritrean Revolution* (London: Earthscan, 1991), p. 13.

the door, we hear four loud cartoonlike strikes, and Fausto walks out again, his eyes wide open, his hair in disorder (image 57). ‘Credo nella conversione di mio cognato’, he concludes.

The cartoon style of the scene – including the loud strikes – emphasises that Fausto’s assumption that the woman would be willing to sleep with him since she is inferior to him, is indeed both comical and monstrous. The fact that it is presented off screen, emphasises Fausto’s blindness for her perception and subjectivity; if we were to see her getting angry and hitting him, she would become an actual character, but since we do not, she could stay a fetishized and eroticised object in his eyes. Moreover, his movements and facial expression when he walks out of the room emphasise his confusion; he does not quite understand what has just happened, as this does not fit his world view, but the first signs of doubt and confusion start to show.

On the one hand, the woman is able to deny Fausto’s advances, closes the door frame in front of him, and is positioned higher in the frame than Fausto (image 56). This alludes to a sense of agency for this fictional character – and of a filmmaker who acknowledges and understands her subjectivity. This could imply that the cameraman is aligning himself with the man in the beginning of the story who films Fausto, and that he centralises the latter’s gaze onto the world. The question of who is subjectified or enthnologized, becomes ever more complex, since this *commedia all’italiana* enthnologizes the *italiano medio*, while the film simultaneously objectifies the Angolan countryside and its people through a seeming documentary approach, while also acknowledging the subjectivity of a character that is traditionally (and by Fausto) enthnologized. It destabilises questions of who is in charge, of and of who is looking at whom – which will destabilise Fausto as well.

On the other hand, we might consider this scene a continuation of the belief in

the *brava gente* trope, as Fausto is clumsy, and unable to do the terrible deeds which Italian colonisers few decades earlier actually did. The (colonial) distance towards Angolia is further underlined by the fact that *Riusciranno* contains several parts which are shot as a documentary.

Fausto nevertheless continues to perform his role of the ‘buono cristiano’. When they have lost their car, he and Ubaldo are offered a lift by a Portuguese couple in their truck. They arrive at a bridge, which is broken in half. Instead of driving away, the Portuguese man grabs his whip, and forces the native Angolan people from the village across the river to support the bridge, in order for the car to drive over it.⁴¹⁵ When they arrive on the other side of the water, Fausto steps out of the car, thanks the Portuguese for the ride, and tells them they will go by foot from now on. He takes distance from the English in Sandokan’s stories, here represented by the Portuguese, but we know that this representation of *italiani brava gente* does not strike with reality (see Forgacs’ account above).

Ubaldo, however, agrees wholeheartedly with Fausto. While the insulted Portuguese couple drive away, they shout something incomprehensible, yet uncomplimentary to the Italians. When Ubaldo wishes them the same, they stop, the man gets out of the car, and attacks Ubaldo. Fausto joins them. Slowly but steadily the villagers gather around the fighting trio, and, seen from a bird eyes perspective, the spectacle looks like a boxing ring (image 58). Immediately after the Portuguese, Fausto, and Ubaldo walk away, the villagers start to re-enact the fight they have just watched (image 59). Once more, Fausto and Ubaldo thus become the object of the Angolans’ laughter, creating a proximity to the viewers – we do not experience this scene through Fausto’s and Ubaldo’s perspective, but through the POV of the

⁴¹⁵ Ettore Scola, *Il cinema e io* (1996), p. 84.

Angolans, turning the *italiani medi* into strangers and spectacles.

Fausto's autodefined whiteness is further questioned in the following pivotal scenes of the film. When Fausto and Ubaldo wake up, they find themselves at the bottom of a mountain, on top of which a sorcerer is praying for rain. Next to them, Angolans are awaiting the sorcerer's message by observing him intensely (images 60, 61). When the latter is carried down the mountain, Fausto recognises Titino in him. Titino first ignores them, but when the duo is surrounded – and observed intently – by the Angolans, Fausto and Ubaldo are called by one of them (image 62): hesitantly, they walk into a hut. When they enter, Titino asks them if they are Italians. 'Tu piuttosto ci devi dire se sei ancora italiano', an irritated Fausto responds. Titino's skin tone is darker than that of Fausto and Ubaldo's, his hair is braided, and he is wearing golden bracelets and colourful hair- and body jewellery (image 63). Physically, he is contrasted to the Italian protagonists, and Fausto implies that this is not 'Italian'. Later on, Titino will describe Fausto and Ubaldo as 'voi bianchi', implying he is Black. 'Se ti dicessimo che siamo venuti per parlare ti andrebbe bene?', Fausto asks. Titino grabs two benches, invites Fausto and Ubaldo to sit on them, and asks in a strong Roman accent, while a cigarette hangs loosely in the corner of his mouth: 'decché dobbiamo parlare?' (1.37.33).

This shift of 'non-Italian' to a very Roman character destabilises the binary of Black and white, and *italianità* and its difference, since it illustrates that these theoretically contradictory concepts for Fausto and Ubaldo, can in fact be combined into one human being. The lines become blurred, and the imperial narrative according to which Italians are superior to Black subjects, is made impossible through an acknowledgement of Titino's 'paradoxical' body.

Compared to the openly racist Portuguese people, or the severe, organised, and

vicious Belgian officer, Titino seems calm and relatively respectful towards the people he now shares the village with. Having changed his identity multiple times without hesitation or effort, and making friends (locals, Black people) and enemies (Europeans, white people) wherever he goes, he embodied several professions typical for colonisers, such as a missionary - Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller begin their overview of Italian colonial history with Catholic missionaries travelling to Africa in as early as 1837 - and a weapon trader - Alberto Sbacchi refers to the fact that Italian colonisers were the first to use chemical weapons in the Ethiopian War, and Giorgio Rochat discusses how ‘hundreds of tons of bombs, gas, and other weapons [...] were shipped’ during that same war.⁴¹⁶ However, he is not organised, and ignores his past, even having forgotten the name of his Roman wife. This position refers to the specific context of the Italian colonial past; ignored, semi-forgotten, disorganised, and yet, far from harmful.

When it starts to rain – Titino was right – the three decide to go back to Rome together. They run off to the shore, where a boat is ready to pick them up. The villagers, having noticed Titino’s disappearance, followed them, and now stand together on the beach, singing a chant while the boat sails away from the coast. At first, they clearly sing non-audible words, but after a while, Titino focusses on the words, and they are twisted into ‘Tití non ci lascia’’. When Fausto looks up, Titino jumps from the ship, and swims back to the coast. In a flash back, we are back in Rome, where Fausto’s friends play a game in which they gather together in a circle,

⁴¹⁶ Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (ed.), *Italian Colonialism* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. xiv-xviii,

Giorgio Rochat, ‘The Italian Airforce in the Ethiopian War (1935-1936), in *Italian Colonialism*, pp. 37-46 (p. 39), Alberto Sbacchi, ‘Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War’, in *Italian Colonialism*, pp. 47-56.

clap their hands and on their laps, and have to name a word associated to the last word that was said. This mimics the hand movements and the chant of the Angolan people standing on the beach. While Titino is being re-welcomed by ‘his’ people, Fausto is about to jump as well. Ubaldo asks him what he is doing, to which Fausto responds that he does not have clear ideas anymore.

The chant turning into ‘Titì non ci lascia’ illustrates a projection of *italianità* onto the world, and a normalisation, seen through the eyes of an Italian subject. Language, indeed, plays a particular role in the film; One could argue that this film is a *commedia in italiano*, even when another language is being spoken. This explains not only Titino’s interpretation of the non-Italian language as Italian, but also Fausto’s continuous belief in being able to communicate with all people he encounters – he simply speaks Italian with an accent of the language of his interlocutor. For instance, he speaks a combination of Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese to the ‘primo aborigena’, and to Durabal, whom he angrily tells, ‘avevo detto di traducid che eravamo todos fratelli! [...] Finché stai con migo, obbedisci e segui, comprensido?’ This mixture of European languages emphasises the dominance of European colonising powers, but also Fausto’s ignorance and arrogance to assume that he will be understood – again, he seems to consider himself the norm; everybody will understand. At the same time, a practical reason for this mixture of languages might have been that the *commedia all’italiana* was made for Italian audiences, and that, even if other languages are spoken, they have to be comprehensible to these Italian audiences.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁷ Whereas Titino’s and Ubaldo’s Roman accent illustrate their cosmopolitan status, Ubaldo’s strong Marchigiano accent, on the other hand, refers to a specific, not hegemonic but peripheral, identity, possibly emphasising his connection to his locality; throughout the film he cannot wait to go back to his family, his

In *Riusciranno?*, Fausto and Ubaldo both hold on to a narrative that does not fit their contextstemming from nineteenth century travel novels, cartoons, and more generally, the imperial narrative. They establish themselves as white as opposed to the Black people they encounter, and openly display racism if that turns out to be beneficial. At other times, they hold on to a moralist interpretation of *fare bella figura* and the myth of *italiani brava gente*. The cinematography of the film reveals a cartoonish perspective on an imaginary of ‘Africa’, when parts are presented as POV shots from Fausto’s and Ubaldo’s perspectives. Through their mechanical elasticity, the two continue to misread their context, in which they become the object of not only the viewers’ laughter, but of the laughter of the people in Angola, the Black Other according to the protagonists, as well. If we compare the images accompanying this chapter (images 42-59) we can recognize a filmic trope: the Black Other who observes Fausto and Ubaldo – and occasionally, Titino (images 60, 61). Indeed, the Black man filming Fausto at the beginning of their Angolan adventure, is the one filming Fausto all throughout their adventures; it is he who is in charge.

Next to a deconstruction of the racializing narrative, which refers in many aspects to the mythologies in the foucauldian sense, many references are made to the specifically Italian case of colonialism. Titino’s particular approach to Angola, on the one hand embodying the entrepreneur/coloniser – ‘ha bruciato mezz’Africa’ – but on the other hand, distinguishing himself from the ‘evil’ Portuguese, and the Belgians, therefore makes way for a continuation of the

home, his football club. These linguistic references all emphasise various aspects of *italianità* in this *commedia all’italiana*.

italiani brava gente myth, but also invites viewers to acknowledge the specific Italian history surrounding colonisation.

For all these reasons, we can speak of a postcolonial awareness in *Riusciranno*. Through a clear analysis of the film's structural features, one comes to the conclusion that *italianità*, the focal point of the *commedia all'italiana*, is a construction, and a performance – and that its binary opposition, Black Otherness, from which *italiani medi* protagonists continue to dissociate themselves through a continuous belief in the imperial narrative, consequentially is a fictive construction stemming from fictive narrations, as well; Italians can be Black, and Black people can be Italians.

In *Riusciranno?*, Fausto constantly reconfirms his *romanità*, through his accent, his behaviour, and flashbacks to his bourgeois Roman life style - taking into account the opening scene, Rome also symbolises empire and colonialism. In a scene with the Belgian officer, the latter describes his love for Italy by listing recipes. Prostitution is presumed by Fausto during his encounter with the young Black nun, and yet he is proven to be mistaken. Fausto constantly *fa bella figura*, which keeps his myth of 'Africa' as 'behind', and him as 'un uomo colto' intact. Finally, Catholicism and the colonialist subtext of missionaries, is represented by the missionary base where Titino has worked as a priest.

The role of dreams and fantasies, and the tropes of representation versus reality, impact the manner in which the protagonists of *Riusciranno* experience their adventures. Fausto's interpretation of 'Africa' is strongly based upon his, in most cases, Italian, literary sources, be they fictional or 'non-fictional'.⁴¹⁸ Every

⁴¹⁸ I find this distinction problematic, since I often find subjective, or fictive, texts more 'objective' since they can metaphorically be interesting, and since they are presented as coming from the artistic minds of the

situation or person he encounters, he links to something he has read, as a kind of constant state of cognitive dissonance.

Gradually, the protagonists refer more and more anxiously to notions of Blackness and whiteness – a reference to the Italian colonial past in which this binary was constructed and exploited. The films end with question marks: ‘chi conosce bene chi’? The Angolan man we have seen actively framing Fausto from all sides (images 51, 53, 54, 55) - which is even encouraged by Ubaldo – is symbolic for the spectacle shift from *italiani medi* to colonial others, which become Others, through which the plot of *Riusciranno*, and the protagonists, are framed, and put into existence. It is he who is asking the question of the title to us.

creators. A presumed objectivity, instead, I find problematic since the observer always influences their context, and interprets it through their subjectivity.

Images



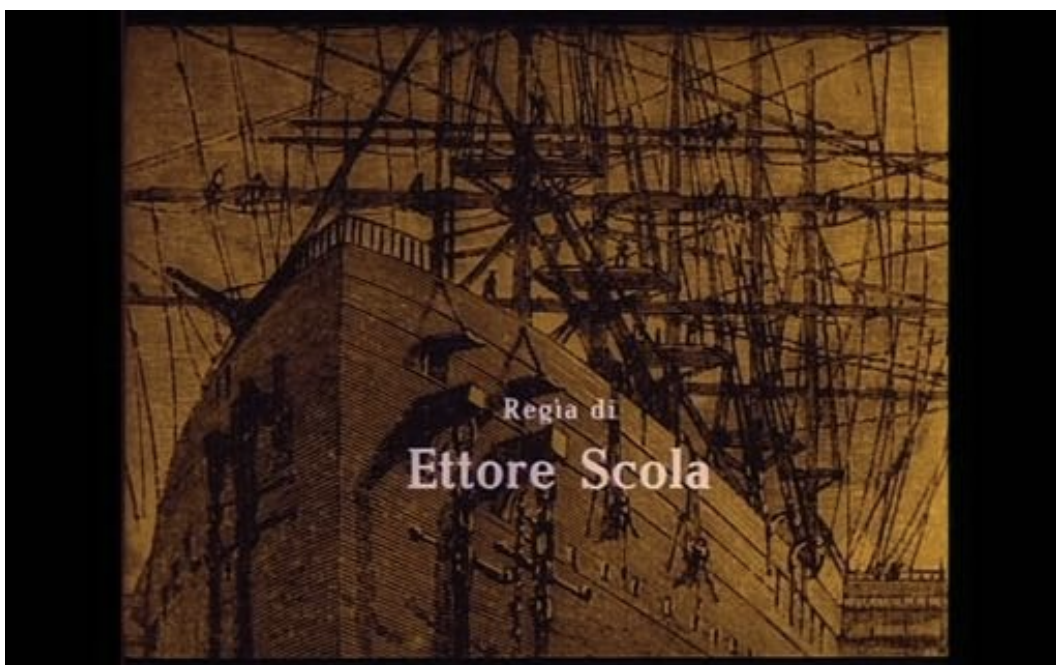
46 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, opening credits)



47 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, opening credits)



48 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, opening credits)



49 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, opening credits)



50 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, opening credits)



51 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 14.16)



52 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 02.14)



53 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 13.51)



54 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 14.21)



55 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 14.05)



56 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 52.00)



57 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 52.10)



58 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1.00.46)



59 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1.02.05)



60 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1.33.18)



61 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1.33.18)



62 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1.35.43)



63 Still *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?* (Ettore Scola, 1.37.33)

7 Black Film? *Amarcord*, or *Asarcurdem*

Through the structural and contextual analyses of the four *commedie all'italiana* that form the corpus of this study with a focus on the discursivity of Blackness, different aspects, and various kinds, of o/Otherness have illustrated that both notions of (white) *italianità* and its Black Others are everchanging imaginaries. While a persistence of “othering” does manifest itself, gender, class, culture, skin colour, religion, and behaviour that does not fit with the notion of *fare bella figura*, are all introduced by *italiani medi* characters as signs of difference, depending on the plot’s specificities and the film’s historical context. As such, my definition of the notion of Blackness is in these films continuously rearticulated. This persistence of the need to “other” therefore informs us more about the portrayal of the *italiano medio*’s anxiety surrounding ideas of belonging, suggesting a constant uncertain position within transnational imaginaries of north and south - this might be the only stable feature in portrayals of this character.

This confirms on the one hand Shelleen Greene’s study on Italian filmic productions, in which she concludes that the Italian internal ‘racial heterogeneity’ as it is defined through the *questione meridionale* in the figure of the *meticcio* illustrates the ‘unstable categories of “citizen” and “non-citizen”’. Next to the *questione meridionale*, the unstable characteristics surrounding a presumed Italian whiteness is illustrated outside of Italy (and outside of cinema) as well, since Italian and Irish immigrants in the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century were considered Black at the time, while these groups have since shifted position - although we can still speak of gradations of whiteness: ‘Latins, the Irish and Jews, [...] are rather less securely white than Anglos, Teutons and

Nordics.⁴¹⁹ The American Pepita, in *La moglie bionda*, will always remain blonde, but the Italian characters in all films discussed are able to change position between presumed whiteness and Blackness, at times, changing the spectacle shift themselves, and at other times, being forced to being objectified (*La moglie bionda*, *Riusciranno?*).

On the other hand, this realization brings us to identifying intersections with various constructions of otherness, pointing in the direction, for instance, of the excellent studies by Bini and Fullwood on gender constructions in the *commedia all'italiana*, with a focus on the increasing anxiety demonstrated by male characters (Bini), and the genderization of spaces (Fullwood). It also brings us to Shelleen Greene and Danielle Hipkins, who dedicate chapters or sections on the notion of the *commedia all'italiana* in their research projects as well; Greene relates it to depictions of racial hierarchies in Italy, arguing that Italian racial and identity formation are depicted in a comical, light manner in *Mafioso* and *Pane e cioccolata*, and that the north/south division as described by her 'remains a lens through which to view Italy's (...) multiracial landscape'. Hipkins recognises in the figure of the prostitute the trope of the 'borderline', a marginalization, and an 'internal other' not dissimilar to the southerner.⁴²⁰ While discussing other post-war Italian cinema (no *commedie*), such as *Campane a martello* (Luigi Zampa, 1949) and *Napoli milionaria* (De Filippo, 1950), one of her chapter's title summarises the various aspects of the imaginary of the 'new nation's 'Others' as

⁴¹⁹ Richard Dyer, 'The Matter of Whiteness', in *Theories of Race and Racism. A Reader*, ed. by John Solomos and Les Back (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 539-48 (p. 543). Cfr. Noel Inatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁴²⁰ Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects* (2014), p. 209; Danielle Hipkins, *Italy's Other Women* (2016), pp. 326-7, 103.

discussed also in the previous chapters: women with money (*La moglie bionda*), race, and the south (referring to Greene, and the fear of not belonging to the north, present in all films discussed above).⁴²¹ Other studies on the notion of class, sexuality, or ability in relation to the *commedia all'italiana* could prove interesting in order to grasp the *commedia all'italiana*, and its portrayals of the construction of *italianità*, from other perspectives.

The above could tell us about *commedie all'italiana* in which race is less evident; often illustrating other modes of representing a constructed *italianità* based on binary notions, these films always asks for not taking what we see seriously, or literally, given the typical *commedia all'italiana* approach of the grotesque. Moreover, as we have seen in the first two episodes of *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, an absence of Black o/Others can still refer to a strong desire to belong to the north (in *L'uomo dei 5 palloni*), while a positioning in a prefilmic space (Fullwood) can still refer to the Fascist past (*L'ora di punta*) – silence can speak.

Central in the films analysed above, is commodification of social relationships - one of the key themes of the *commedia all'italiana* as argued also by Bini.⁴²² The expected colonial, racializing undertone (we can think of slavery) is performed in one of the films by an *italiano medio* character (in *Il moralista*), but overall, women (*Oggi, domani, dopodomani, Lo sceicco bianco, Il moralista*), colleagues (*Il moralista, Riusciranno?*), and family members (*Riusciranno?*) are equally commodified, again, underlining the intersectional nature of forms of othering existing in these *commedie*.

⁴²¹ Danielle Hipkins, *Italy's Other Women* (2016), pp. 101-141.

⁴²² Andrea Bini, *Male Anxiety* (2015), p. 8.

While the uncertainty surrounding a presumed or performed Italian whiteness increases in the films discussed in the previous chapters, the former colonised Other, in turn, gains in agency in relation to the former colonising Italians. Whereas the Black Other, from the perspective of the *italiano medio*, passively makes possible a construction of the notion of *italianità*, this dependent relationship is one-directional, and becomes increasingly hard to hold on to. Indeed, Black Others observe *italiani medi* (in all films), are in charge of framing and filming Italians (*La moglie bionda*, *Riusciranno?*), of capturing them (*Il moralista*, *La moglie bionda*) – ‘they’ even infiltrate in the construction of *italianità*, as they behave just like Italians (*La moglie bionda*), or Italians become them (*Riusciranno?*). In this study, I thus commented on the assumption that the (former) coloniser exclusively provides the terms in which the colonised subjects gain their identities, since in the analyses above, the opposite proves to be the case.

Whereas the characters of the Black Other evolve in each successive films, gaining in agency, and finally, framing the *italiano medio*, the latter appears to remain more fixed in his belief system, as though standing still in time. This is illustrated in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, where female roles and Black Others are interpreted by various actors, while the *italiano medio* character is interpreted in all episodes by the same actor. In *Lo sceicco bianco*, *Il moralista*, and *Riusciranno?*, this fixated character is played by local *divo* Alberto Sordi, epitome of the *italiano medio*, and as such, trespassing boundaries of representation and reality. Therefore, as suggested in the title of this thesis, I here centralise the crisis of the much needed construction of a white character of *italianità*. But while the

commedie all'italiana centralise *italiani medi*, they allude to, and in some cases actually portray, the existence of Black subjectivity.

This persistent feature of the protagonists that I have termed, following Bergson, mechanical elasticity, inviting the viewers to interpret the films in a comical manner, is ridiculed more overtly in every film that follows in this study. While suggested merely at a 'meta' level through the comedic approach of the grotesque in *Lo sceicco bianco*, from *Il moralista* onwards, it occurs inside of the film plots as well, as characters presented as *italiani medi* are mocked by these Black Others more overtly and explicitly in every following film. Their continuous striving to colonise Black subjects by attempting to define and control them, while resisting a clear autodefinition, is reversed by the fact that ever more clearly, the character of the Black Other is the one who knows the *italiano medio* well. In this sense, they are able to "show themselves" as asked by Chow, simply by framing the *italiano medio* characters as we follow their gaze, and as a consequence, ridiculing them ever more actively.

The theme of knowledge, which recalls the title of *Io la conoscevo bene*, is central to the films analysed above, since the colonial epistemology is questioned by these 'knowing' characters; 'The significance of Orientalism is that as a mode of knowing the other it was a supreme example of the construction of the other, a form of authority.'⁴²³ Turning this around, the portrayal of a Black Other knowing the *italiano medio* can be considered a postcolonial critique. In fact, actions and attitudes of Black subjects suggest how counterproductive a continuation of this colonial narrative is even from the perspective of the *italiano medio*, since it

⁴²³ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies. The Key Concepts. Second Edition* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 153.

makes the latter into the *inetto*, unable to come to an understanding of the world. Oftentimes, this inaptitude is expressed through the threat of being perceived as mad by the *italiani medi*'s social environment, constantly lingering in the background, most explicitly in *Lo sceicco bianco*, and *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*.

We could argue that the four (and indeed, many other) *commedie all'italiana* discussed here offer a perspective on the Italian society that is 'more real' than reality, since they display aspects of their historical contexts which in reality are not as isolated; certain tendencies of the *italiano medio* characters that are the focus of this research, and of the *commedie all'italiana* analysed above, would go unnoticed without the isolation offered in these films. This is the core characteristic of the comedic approach of the grotesque: because of their isolation, these aspects of 'reality' seemingly become monstrous depictions; we lose a sense of perspective because of their isolation, and this is what makes them, occasionally, seem frightening. I conducted this research in a similar manner: I centralised the appearance of Black Others specifically if they could result pivotal for either the plots of the film, or the meta, cinematographic, and comparative story of the development of this character. In other words: I isolated characters which have been marginalised thus far.

Considering the open endings of *Lo sceicco bianco*, *Il moralista*, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, and *Riusciranno i nostri eroi a ritrovare l'amico misteriosamente scomparso in Africa?*, we could regard these films as something of a story cycle – not quite one *film a episodi* as discussed in chapter five, but a continuous dialogue surrounding the very notion of Blackness in relation to *italianità*. Similar to chapter one, where an analysis of *Io la conoscevo bene*

guides us through issues surrounding Italy's colonial enterprises, its neglect, its echoes, and its negations, in this chapter, *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1973) serves as a guideline in order to discuss the itinerary of the character of the Black Other, and its implications and effects on the character identifiable as the *italiano medio* in the *commedie all'italiana* analysed in the previous chapters. I thus continue the inductive approach as described in the introduction. Through a brief analysis of this film, I discuss how cinematographic constructions, reconfigurations, and/or comments and critique on the notion of *italianità* and its (layers of) Black Otherness are negotiated in the four films.

Produced in 1973, five years after the release of *Riusciranno?*, and set in the 1930s, before the setting of the plot of the first film of this corpus, *Amarcord* can be regarded both as the culmination of this itinerary of Blackness in the *commedia all'italiana*, while simultaneously bringing us back to the time of a crucial period for the construction of the notion of Black Otherness as presented in the *commedie all'italiana*.

Since the day of its release, *Amarcord* has been one of Fellini's most celebrated films, attracting millions of viewers, both in-, and outside of Italy.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ Frank Burke, 'Fellini: Changing the Subject', in Peter Bondanella, Cristina Degli Espositi (ed.), *Perspectives on Federico Fellini* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1993), pp. 275-92 (pp. 275-76). Cfr. Peter Bondanella, *The Films of Federico Fellini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 129. For further publications on *Amarcord*, see, for instance, James Hay, 'Grandfather Fascism and *Amarcord*', *Perspectives on Federico Fellini*, ed. Peter Bondanella and Cristina Degli Espositi (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1993), pp. 166-79, Frank Burke, *Fellini's Films. From Postwar to Postmodern* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), pp. 204-15, Tullio Kezich, *Federico. Fellini, la vita e i film* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2002), pp. 299-305, Andrea Minuz, *Viaggio al termine dell'Italia. Fellini politico* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2012), pp. 72-80, Federico Fellini, *Fare un film* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), pp. 152-57, Dorothée Bonnigal, 'Fellini's *Amarcord*: Variations on the Libidinal Limbo of Adolescence', *Federico Fellini: Contemporary*

Set in Fascist Italy in a *borgo* that shows strong similarities with Fellini's home town of Rimini, it discusses the role the abstract institutions of Fascism and the Catholic Church played in the lives of Italians growing up in the 1930s, addressing the notion of a collective identity, and oftentimes illustrating the makers' own subjective experiences of coming of age under these specific circumstances. One of the characters' fantasy of a group of eroticised women that form part of a harem illustrates the strong Orientalising tone of the imperial narrative during Mussolini's reign. In the case of *Amarcord*, the character's fantasy is not taken seriously by other characters in the film, offering a double-layered mockery of thinking in line with the imperial epistemology: a micro-mockery inside the plot, and a meta-mockery in terms of how the character's fantasy is presented, and comes across to the viewers of the film.

'A'm'arcord', Romagnolo for 'I remember', suggests that the film's main concerns are memory, and subjectivity.⁴²⁵ The film title is an account of the characteristic publicity apparatus through which Federico Fellini came to be known as an *auteur* – a promotional narrative frequently reproduced by critics and scholars; the title of *Amarcord* refers to one persona, implying the director's

Perspectives, ed. Frank Burke and Marguerite R Waller (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 137-54, Cosetta Gaudenzi, 'Memory, Dialect, Politics: Linguistic Strategies in Fellini's *Amarcord*', *Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Burke and Marguerite R Waller (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 155-68.

⁴²⁵ Fellini argued that 'Amarcord', in the case of his film title, does not mean 'I remember'; 'instead, it is a kind of cabalistic word, a word of seduction, the brand of an aperitif: *Amarcord*'. Federico Fellini, 'Amarcord: The Fascism within Us', in *Federico Fellini. Essays in Criticism*, ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 24. He is also a self-proclaimed *bugiardo*: cfr. Damian Pettigrew, *Fellini: je suis un grand menteur* (documentary, 2002).

individual artistic input.⁴²⁶ However, I agree with Frank Burke that *Amarcord* ‘emphasizes the mere mechanisms of representation by asserting “I remember”, but providing no “I” who remembers – thus defeating reference’.⁴²⁷ Through this, the film comments on the very notion of *auteurism*. Pier Paolo Pasolini’s assertion that the film should have been named *Asarcurdem*, ‘we remember’, refers to Fellini’s collaboration with screenwriter Tonino Guerra for the film.⁴²⁸ Since this research predominantly focuses on a continuous belief in the narrative accompanying Italy’s imperial enterprises by the same type of the *italiano medio*, despite Italy’s loss of the war and its colonies, and despite a continuously changing environment, *Asarcurdem* could be considered one of the main themes of the other films discussed in this thesis as well. Moreover, the character of the *italiano medio* implies a collective recognition and self-identification from Italian audience members - *Amarcord*’s plot is, just as the narration in *Lo sceicco bianco*, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, and to a certain extent, *Riusciranno?*, presented predominantly through POV shots from the perspective of the villagers, who remember collectively. Finally, *Amarcord* has become part of ‘our’ history; both because the film as an artefact has been acknowledged as part of the Italian

⁴²⁶ Cfr. Frank Burke, ‘Fellini: Changing the Subject’, *Perspectives on Federico Fellini*, ed. Peter Bondanella, Cristina Degli Espositi (New York: G.K. Hall, 1993), pp. 275-292. *Otto e mezzo* (1963) refers to Fellini’s career as a film director as it is his ‘eighth and a half’ film; English translations of *Satyricon* (1969), and *Roma* (1972) became *Fellini’s Satyricon* and *Fellini’s Roma*; in *I clowns* Fellini himself is part of the film.

⁴²⁷ Frank Burke, ‘From Representation to Signification’, *Romance Languages Annual* 1 (1989), 34-40 (p. 36). CFR. Dorothee Bonnigal, ‘Fellini’s *Amarcord*: Variations on the Libidinal Limbo of Adolescence’, in *Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Frank Burke, and Marguerite R Waller (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 137-54.

⁴²⁸ Tullio Kezich, *Federico. Fellini, la vita e i film* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007 [first published in 2002]), p. 300.

cultural heritage, and in terms of its representation of a collective memory of a specific period in the history of the peninsula: the beginning of the 1930s.⁴²⁹

The film is an account of four seasons in the abovementioned *borgo* that parallels in many aspects Fellini's birthplace in Emilia-Romagna, Rimini. However, since its name is never mentioned, the film depicts not only *italiano medio* characters, but furthermore *un paese italiano medio*, again emphasising the theme of *Asarcurdem*, as it metaphorically represents many villages of many *italiani medi*.

Predominantly shot through the POV of the adolescent protagonist Titta, the dominating institutions of Fascism, and the Catholic Church, are depicted as seen from a relative outsider perspective, as they belong to the world of 'adults' which Titta does not associate himself with. This parallels the lost sense of imperial superiority by *italiano medio* characters in the films of the corpus of this study, which creates an increasingly lost sense of touch with 'reality'. The trope of the far away city of Rome as the metropole is also central to *Amarcord*. Whereas *Lo sceicco bianco*'s protagonists come from the countryside to visit *la città eterna*, and in *Il moralista*, and to a certain extent, in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, and *Riusciranno?*, *italiano medio* characters can be directly associated with Rome because they live there, in *Amarcord*, 'Rome', in the shape of Fascism (the government) and the Catholic Church (the Vatican) come to colonise the villagers, paralleling the colonisation of African countries during Italian Fascism. As Italo

⁴²⁹< http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2010/07/15/guerra-amarcord.html?refresh_ce>

[last visited on 27 November 2017]; cfr. Federico Fellini, 'Amarcord: The Fascism within Us', *Federico Fellini. Essays in Criticism*, ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 23.

Calvino remarks, Rome and the province are thus interconnected – another deconstructed binary.⁴³⁰

Amarcord both celebrates and criticises life inside a *paese medio*, controlled by social conventions, the notion of *fare bella figura*, and on a more structural level, by the Catholic Church, and by Fascism. Even though Titta is the protagonist of *Amarcord*,⁴³¹ the camera loses him from sight in many scenes, focusing on other members of the village community – therefore creating an atmospheric collective experience, both appealing to various types of audience members of the film, and creating a lost sense of individual identity, as all characters emphasise through often grotesque performances their role within the community. This serves to relativize memory, making it an impressionistic, collective assertion of a shared narrative (the nation, *italiani brava gente*, etc.) more so than a specific historical memory of events or ideologies. Even the specific abuse of the castor oil episode is pressed into a broader narrative and so loses some of its violence. The prevalence of fog in the film persistently suggests this.

The fact that the film refers to a larger social structure, instead of merely focusing on individuals, underlines on the one hand a critical perspective on the suppressing characteristics of having to follow social conventions, while simultaneously inviting many a varied group of viewers to remember what happened during Fascism, in order to realise what could still be left in memories, habits, and social constructs.

⁴³⁰ Italo Calvino, 'Autobiografia di uno spettatore', in Federico Fellini, *Fare un film* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. xx.

⁴³¹ His name is a reference to Fellini's school friend Titta Benzi: another autoreferential, *auteurist*, element.

In *Lo sceicco bianco*, the architecture of the metropole of Rome functions as a frame, creating physical and philosophical boundaries for its protagonists whereas the beach and the sea represent an opening to ‘other worlds’ and alternative ideas (and indeed, expositions of female nudity and femininity, as discussed by Fullwood). This counts to a somewhat less overt degree for *Oggi, domani, dopomani*, and *Riusciranno?*, as well, since Fausto in *Riusciranno?* has to leave Rome in order to ‘find himself’, while in *L’uomo dei cinque palloni*, Mario is trapped in his expensive palazzo, E.U.R. becomes the framework for some sort of neofascist revival in *L’ora di punta*, and in *La moglie bionda*, Mario and Pepita leave Rome in order to change their lives (even though they do not have the same scopes). Correspondingly, in *Amarcord*, it is the *borgo* that creates the framework of geographical and ideological limitations for the characters, whereas the sea and the *Grand Hotel* offer the villagers openings to other characters and cultures. While *Piazza San Pietro* accepts *Lo sceicco bianco*’s protagonists into the hegemonic power of Rome and the Catholic Church, but simultaneously closes them in, the main square of the *borgo* in *Amarcord* has a similar function. Inside of the *borgo*, Titta’s parents continuously instruct their children to *fare bella figura*, as there is a strong social control in their neighbourhood. This control is executed by the two abstract institutions dwarfing the *borgo* and its inhabitants, seeking to occupy the village by the two abovementioned threatening those who resist their ideologies, and celebrating those who partake – Fascism and the Catholic Church. Mussolini hoped to “fascistize” the Nation, until Italian and fascist, almost like Italian and Catholic,

are one and the same thing.’⁴³² The pope and Benito Mussolini are the central figures in the imaginary of a collective identity: framed portraits of these two powerful, white, male characters hang high above the classrooms of Titta’s school.⁴³³

These two dominant forces continue to be tropes in all films that form the corpus of this research; *italiani medi* characters hold on to these narratives in order to establish a sense of self. As such, *Amarcord*’s plot both predicts (considering its time frame), and reflects on (considering the time in which it was produced) how these two institutions would have continued to play a role in the establishment of a sense of *italianità* in the after World War period.

A third framed portrait in Titta’s classroom refers to Italy’s colonial enterprises, another recurring theme in the films discussed, and shows a third white male character with a particular moustache, who is wearing a hat and jacket that identify him as a high rank military official in Italy’s colonies: it could be Vittorio Bottego (1860-1897), Italian army official and ‘explorer’ of the area of Jubaland, which is part of current Somalia.⁴³⁴ Emphasizing the importance of the colonial enterprises for the construction of a sense of a collective identity, as I discussed in chapter one, this framed portrait underlines the central thesis offered

⁴³² Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 19.

⁴³³ A crucifix hangs even higher above these two portraits, reminding us of the shot in *Lo sceicco bianco* in which Ivan talks with a large crucifix hanging behind him, see image 6, pp. 149, 162.

⁴³⁴ Cfr. Vittorio Orsenigo (ed.), *Vittorio Bottego. L’esplorazione del Giuba. Viaggio di scoperta nel cuore dell’Africa sotto gli auspici della Società Geografica Italiana* (Milan: Greco & Greco editori, 2003); Aroldo Lavagetto, *La vita eroica del capitano Bottego (1893-1897)* (Milan: Mondadori, 1934), two portraits of his can be found between page 16 and 17. I thank Dr. Gianmarco Mancosu for helping me with the identification.

in this dissertation.

Similar to *Lo sceicco bianco* and *Il moralista*, in *Amarcord*, predominantly the Catholic Church dominates and controls the villagers' sexual, and consequentially, social, behaviour. Sexual repression is illustrated by the women's obsession over a visit by a provincial secretary of the Fascist party, *il federale* (emphasizing that the Church benefitted from the glorification of fascist leaders, specifically Mussolini), the male villagers' lust for newly arriving prostitutes (which at that time, before the *Legge Merlin*, was still legal), Titta's uncle Teo's crying for a woman (since he lives in a madhouse [referring again to Foucault], he is single), and the following story, presented as an Orientalist erotic, cartoonish, fantasy by Biscein, the street vendor.⁴³⁵

The *avvocato* occasionally joins the international crowd in the *Grand Hotel*. From the hotel lobby he looks into the camera and tells a story he heard from Biscein, who he describes as a *bugiardo nato*; 'ne inventa una dopo l'altra', emphasising the mythical (Orientalist) character of this narration. It recounts a visit by an emir and his thirty concubines – this, the *avvocato* confirms, all truly happened, as he was present, as well. A flash back brings us to the entrance of the hotel, where a car stops, and two men with a dark skin tone jump out, dressed in black suits and both wearing a fez (images 64, 65). The fez, a red cap of a cylindrical shape, became a typical Orientalist accessory in the beginning of the twentieth century for Western men.⁴³⁶ The way the men are dressed is thus a sign

⁴³⁵ Cfr. Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 8-9.

⁴³⁶ Richard Martin, *Orientalism. Visions of the East in Western Dress* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994), p. 55. Cfr. Selim Deringil, 'The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808 to 1908', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 35.1 (1993), 3-29.

of Orientalist imaginaries – this is probably how Biscein would fantasise ‘Oriental men’ would look like. Jumpy music accompanies the hectic scene. The men throw their swords in the air and push people away, commanding them to keep a distance, and shouting in an incomprehensible language, confirming the trope of the Black Other in the background of a scene, exhibiting more physically expressive behaviours, and serving merely as accessories for the plot of the white man, as described in the previous chapters. Following these two men are thirty women, dressed in large white drapes with two holes for their eyes. Biscein the street vendor passes by, stops, and looks at the women with open eyes and a lustful gaze. In the next shot, the hotel lobby is filled with the thirty women, and with hotel employers, who bow to welcome their new guests, the emir, and his entourage. The melody of the background music (composed by Nino Rota) now contains Middle Eastern influences.⁴³⁷

All films discussed in the previous chapters explicitly refer to fictional sources, such as cartoons, travel literature, and Hollywood stars, as affecting the protagonists’ experiences and interpretations of their *realtà*, more specifically, their interpretations of *italianità* and Black Otherness. Orientalist erotic fantasies are opposed to the Catholic moral code of purity and innocence and the construction of whiteness, and while Orientalized characters are considered outsiders of *italianità*, Catholicism is presented as nearly synonymous to the imaginary of the national character. This illustrates on the one hand the dependency on, and influences of, Orientalist narrations, myths, while these

⁴³⁷ Franco Sciannameo, *Nino Rota, Federico Fellini, and the Making of an Italian Cinematic Folk Opera*, Amarcord (Lewiston, N.Y., Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005).

commedie all'italiana simultaneously potentially add new material to these Orientalist fantasies – despite the fact that they are continuously presented through the comedic approach of the grotesque. This tension illustrates that the films on the one hand reinforce stereotypes, while on the other hand, criticising them.

The four *commedie all'italiana* discussed above are predominantly presented POV, emphasising the *italianità* of these films. The rest of Biscein's account is presented as his subjective experience, POV, as well. At night, in the dark, he sees the women in white drapes on their balconies, summoning him to climb up: they throw sheets at him, tied together until they reach the ground – a fairy tale trope. Inside, the thirty women, dressed in Orientalized clothing (wide, brightly coloured harem pants and small, tight tops, ornate jewellery) are asleep on each their own tiny tapestry: one by one he wakes them up while playing an Eastern melody on his flute (images 66-67). The women subsequently belly dance inside a large bathtub/swimming pool. In the background, palm trees and Moorish architecture complete the Orientalist fantasy, and frame it, keeping it inside his mind: a cartoon frame. Biscein tells us that of the thirty women, 'ne ha fatte fuori' twenty-eight, the *avvocato* laughingly recounts, still looking into the camera, back in the hotel lobby. This expression implies an aggressive deed, as if Biscein killed the women one by one. Even though it is a commonly used phrase, and therefore could not be translated directly with 'killing off' thirty women, the sense that he dispensed with them or dealt with them as a quantity of objects remains telling, and reverberates the notion of social relations being commodified, and colonised.

This erotic fantasy is rooted in Fascist rhetoric of the inferior, and female, qualities of cultures that were colonised by Italians such as the military man

whose portrait hangs in Titta's classroom: the lyrics of the song *Faccetta nera*, famous during the 1930s, recount how Italians rescue 'a poor Abyssinian girl', glorifying the Italian colonial enterprises, and attesting to the trope of the Black Venus. Biscein might not be occupying an Orientalist interpretation of non-Italian spaces in the literal sense, but he is 'occupying' (killing, if we take his expression of 'farne fuori ventotto' literally) his Orientalist interpretation of women.⁴³⁸

In the trope of the harem, present also in *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, Hipkins recognizes moreover a nostalgia for the brothel.⁴³⁹ The *Legge Merlin* (named after senator Lina Merlin) abolished prostitution on a national level, closing brothels all over Italy, and was put into act in 1958. In many *commedie all'italiana*, she points out, therefore, the theme of prostitution alludes to this nostalgia as well.

The female characters in *Amarcord* presented as Italians are able to express themselves more freely than in the previously discussed films, or than Biscein's women: Indeed, there is a scene in which the new prostitute of the *borgo*'s brothel arrives, and is celebrated. Moreover, the character of Volpina is known by all villagers as a sexually expressive person. Titta's encounter with *la tabaccaia*, who, on a late afternoon, asks him to lift her up and caress her breasts, further illustrates the women's relative agency to express their sexuality (albeit in ways understood to be denormalised, 'irregular', and so the object of curiosity; and although Titta fails to satisfy *la tabaccaia*'s needs). Both characters are

⁴³⁸ Cfr. Linde Luijnenburg, *La piccolo Roma: The Female Characteristics of Unoccupied Spaces in Totò Films*, in *Architecture in Asmara. Colonial Origin and Postcolonial Experiences* ed. Peter Volgger and Stefan Graf (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2017), pp. 316-25. Cfr. Ennio Flaiano, *Tempo di uccidere*.

⁴³⁹ Danielle Hipkins, *Italy's Other Women* (2016), p. 309.

somewhat two-dimensional (Volpina more so than *la tabbacciaia*) but they are not consequentially regarded as outsiders and brought to a madhouse as Wanda is in *Lo sceicco bianco* when she expresses her sexual desire. Made during the Second Feminist Wave which had a local, and very active, branch in Italy – a development which interested Fellini, as illustrated in his *La città delle donne* (1980) – this surely had an impact on Fellini's portrayal of women in this film.

The 'Arab' men protecting the women with their swords frame Biscein's Orientalist story by introducing it, and through a stereotypical, cartoonish, portrayal of how men with a darker skin tone usually feature as an ornament in narratives about white (wo)men at the time, they follow the trope of Black non-Italians as objects. Biscein wins from the Black men by still managing to 'far fuori' the women; the men's protection was in vain. Instead of having to be afraid of Black men raping Italian white women, as Italian propaganda illustrations showed, this fantasy illustrates the opposite (but might be somewhat inspired by it).

The frame inside the plot of *Amarcord*, created by the *avvocato*'s account of Biscein's fairy tale, recounts the *fotoromanzo* plot in *Lo sceicco bianco*. The cartoonlike portrayal of the Orientalized women and men underlines the dependency on an Other in the lacanian sense in order to establish a sense of an identity (through an expression of heterosexuality): a sense of a superior *italianità*, in the shape of heteroreferential racism in Taguieff's sense. However, the fairy tale is believed to be a lie by the *avvocato* inside *Amarcord*'s film plot, and by Wanda at the end of *Lo sceicco bianco*, creating an extra layer of mockery to this Orientalist, imperialist, fantasy. Both the plot of *Amarcord* as a whole, and the characters inside the plot, explicitly acknowledge therefore the grotesque

quality of this narrative, similar to the other films analysed in the previous chapters (namely, *Oggi, domani, dopodomani*, and *Riusciranno?*).

At the end of the film, Titta's mother has died, while the woman he is in love with, Gradisca, is getting married. As such, the film is structured as a coming-of-age story. However, in the last scene, which takes place at Gradisca's wedding celebration at the beach, nobody knows where Titta went. Biscein greets the viewers of the film, 'Vi saluto, andate a casa!', suggesting that the whole film was actually one of his invented 'cartoon' stories. Similar to all the other films discussed above, it is unclear what will happen after the film, who was performing for whom, and whether it was all an Orientalist fairy-tale or not.

Amarcord's finale, similar to all other films discussed above, is dominated by an atmosphere of doubt: have the protagonists reached a certain level of maturity, or do they still depend on an imaginary of an Other (fascism, the Catholic Church, the imperial narrative, the Black Other) who dictates them how to be? In *Lo sceicco bianco*, Wanda and Ivan's individual anxieties surrounding imaginaries of belonging to a specific racial, national identity, symbolise the uncertain situation the peninsula found itself in shortly after the loss of World War II, during a public ignorance of the imperial enterprises, in which Italy occupied an in-between space. Any form of fetishizing in Sara Ahmed's terms, specifically of a physical kind, is therefore welcomed with open arms by Ivan and Wanda, out of a desperate need to feel like they belong. The layers of physical difference create a complex system in which it is not always clear who will belong, and who will not. Physical whiteness, however, facilitates the male *italiano medio's* projection of virtuousness in women, whereas Blackness, and

Orientalism, facilitate both women's and men's projections of erotic desire, suppressed by the Catholic Church.

This counts for all film plots, if we consider them from the perspective of the *italiano medio* protagonist. However, already in *Il moralista*, the characters identifiable as the Black Other, gain in control, since the plots of the films suggest that they perform their interpretation of Black Otherness in order to get their way, while the *italiano medio* stays behind in prison, having misinterpreted the context he finds himself in. In *La moglie bionda*, it is not only the characters of the Black Other who dominate Marcello Mastroianni's character from the very beginning (he is dependent on them buying his wife); his blonde, seemingly subordinate wife, has been playing along with his interpretation of her as superficial, and inferior – not dissimilar to how the character of Adriana in *Io la conoscevo bene* is interpreted by male characters – while in the end, his wife gets her way. This underlines the failure of this darker *italiano medio* in relation to this blonde, northern woman. The Arab harem men get their way, too, as they destabilise heteronormative views on society, making use of his ignorance. *Riusciranno?*, finally, still portrays *italiani medi* characters believing in the imperial narratives (mostly through 'knowledge' gained while reading adventure novels and cartoons) but towards the end of the film, the *italiano medio* character admits to having lost his 'chiare idee', while the actual character in charge turns out to be the man who frames Fausto: his perception of the Black Other. Finally, by illustrating that the *italiano medio* Titino has been blackened, the notion of white *italianità* is negated.

Amarcord, on the other hand, set during Mussolini's reign in the beginning of the 1930s, portrays a less overtly expressed anxiety surrounding issues of

individual racial identities, and as a consequence, a collective racial identity. The two Roman forces that occupy the village from the outside in, Catholicism and Fascism, both scare, and excite the villagers, as is illustrated in Titta's father having to drink castor oil since he has resisted Fascism on the one hand, and on the other hand, in the portrait of the military in Titta's classroom representing the colonising mission, and Biscein's Orientalising story. The Orientalist narratives still seem relatively harmless; a fantasy story of a lonely street vendor fades away as insignificant in comparison to the concrete pain the Fascists bring to the *borgo* and some of its inhabitants. The Other in this context, is therefore indeed the colonising, dividing Fascist (who all have 'different' accents in the film), through whose gazes the villagers gain their subjectivity. Moreover, the seed of racism was planted from within the Italian society, most aggressively through Fascist rhetoric (even though Forgacs rightfully states that racism started long before Fascism⁴⁴⁰), illustrating that the real fear is of a constructed Other, created through, or more precisely, exploited by, Fascist rhetoric, and the Others of that time: The Fascists and Catholics occupying the village.

The films that form the corpus of this research constantly centralise the white *italiano medio*'s perspective. However, denaturalising the former's white, and also male, heterosexual, and morally just, identity through mocking him with the comedic approach of the grotesque, and moreover, through portraying him as less *furbo* than the characters he identifies as Black Others, the films contain an invitation to other filmmakers to include portrayals of the subjectivity of these Black Others. Taking into account as well that, from *Il moralista* onwards, it is clear that the character Othered by *italiani medi* is the one knowing him wel, the

⁴⁴⁰ David Forgacs, *Italy's Margins* (2016), p. 70 and beyond.

films can be argued to be about the subjectivity, or the perspective, of Black Other characters.

In his study on Film Blackness, Michael Boyce Gillespie argues that he is not interested ‘in claiming that the black lifeworld be the sole line of inquiry that can be made about the idea of black film’,⁴⁴¹ and goes on to discuss what he describes as the ‘burden of representation’:

Any filmmaker can use any filmic strategy to make a point, as long as that strategy is coherent. And Black filmmakers are burdened with the rope chain of ‘reality’ in ways white people simply aren’t. (...) This logic operates with the presumption that the fundamental value of a black film is exclusively measured by a consensual truth of film’s capacity to wholly account for the lived experience or social life of race.⁴⁴²

As argued by Stuart Hall, and following Gillespie’s discussion, if ‘race’ as a cultural phenomenon were to be simplified in order to maintain the idea of a stable racial category, one would use the same essentialist approach as that of anti-black racism. In other words, there is no universal black subjectivity (or spectatorship). Indeed, in the *commedie all’italiana* discussed above, the Black Other characters do not have to provide us with a ‘true’, or ‘appropriate’, representation of any universal kind of otherness; exactly by deconstructing this notion, we come to a better understanding of the fabricated imaginary of Blackness and other forms of o/Otherness. As such, we could argue that

⁴⁴¹ Michael Boyce Gillespie, *Film Blackness: American Cinema and the Idea of Black Film* (Duke University Press) Ebook version.

⁴⁴² Ibidem.

Riusciranno? is Black Film, and that the earlier films are in the process of becoming it.

What, then, is the comedy that is Italy as presented in the *commedie all'italiana*? The films discussed in this study offer a cartoonlike, grotesque, perspective on the *italiano medio*'s mechanical elasticity of a perpetual belief in the colonial epistemology, making him into an *inetto*, incapable to recognise that his racializing tendencies do not protect him against the real danger: his own Fascism. This is how 'a persistence of Othering manifests itself'.

What constitutes whiteness in these films, is not far from what Hipkins recognised in immediate post-war Italian cinema, as discussed above - living according to the Catholic morality, being pure, clean; if female, being a virgin, all relate to the notion of whiteness. But most of all, it constitutes everything that the Black Other is not. As Richard Dyer decided to work on the cultural construct of whiteness, he realised that 'the privilege of being white in white culture is not to be subjected to stereotyping in relation to one's whiteness'. White people, he argues, are stereotyped through means of an identification with nationality, gender, class, sexuality, ability, etcetera; 'Whiteness generally colonises the stereotypical definition of all social categories other than those of race. To be normal, even to be normally deviant (queer, crippled), is to be white.'⁴⁴³ This counts for the *italiano medio*'s perception of his reality, as well, and it also partially explains why these characters hold on to their constructed myths for so long.

Through the appearance of the character of the Black Other, an

⁴⁴³ Richard Dyer, 'The Matter of Whiteness', in *Theories of Race and Racism. A Reader*, ed. by John Solomos and Les Back (London, New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 539-48 (p. 543).

embodiment of this hidden past – Italian colonialism – is discussed, and as such, this character is preferably ignored and otherwise downplayed by *italiani medi*. Rome's neighbourhood of E.U.R. occurs in several films as a historical place with references to the occupation of space, and/or to Roman characters occupying space outside of their city. Catholicism, in all films, reveals strong parallels to colonialism, since one could say that 'it' occupies the *borgo*, constantly reinforces its power onto Ivan and Wanda in Rome, expects Agostino's 'moralist' behaviour to be brought to other nation states, makes Mario feel superior to Muslim Arabs, while Titino starts building a Catholic centre in Angola without ever finishing it, leaving behind unusable ground, and displaying his moral superiority – a colonial narration which is still very much alive in today's society, if we take into account the trope of the white saviour in recent Western films, such as *12 Years a Slave* (Steve McQueen, 2013), *Django Unchained* (Quentin Tarantino, 2012), or *Lincoln* (Steven Spielberg, 2012). Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller assert that Italian colonialism started before the nation state's unification, with Italian Catholic missionaries going to Eritrea in 1837. Another aspect through which Catholicism is linked to colonialism, and to racial superiority, in all films (and indeed in the Italian context of the time) is the displayed Catholic symbolism stimulating a celebration and idolisation of a sense of whiteness and pureness which as a logical opposite has Blackness and impurity.

The non-academic form of narrative production that has received most academic attention with relation to the Italian postcolonial reality, is literature. While there is a lot of interesting studies on Italy's (post-) colonialism, only Leonardo De Franceschi and Shelleen Greene's publications focus elaborately on cinematographic productions from before the 1980s that are not considered

products of ‘auteurs’ in relation to the notion of Blackness. There is a lot to discover surrounding postcolonial critique in Italian art forms, not only by considering cinematographic productions, but also with regard to other visual arts such as photography, painting, and sculpture, musical productions (Italian hip-hop has received some academic attention over the last few years), and television programs (an interesting character from this perspective is for instance Lola Falana).⁴⁴⁴ Moreover, films reveal so many aspects of human interaction, that much more could be argued even about the films analysed above - music, for instance, is a language on its own, similar to silences and moving images. Whereas in some cases, I focused on particular musical elements in the films discussed above, much more could be said about this.

On the one hand, some scholarly echoes of the *italiani brava gente* myth, and on the other hand, some echoes of the myth of a ‘backward Italy’ feed the assumption that Italian ‘genre’ filmmakers did not, or hardly, discuss imperial, racist, and Fascist elements of their society of the present and the past. Italian colonialism is different from other forms of European imperialism, and has a specific historical context, traditions, and academic and artistic focal points. Bringing a new light onto some aspects of this specificity adds to understanding today’s society.

⁴⁴⁴ Derek Duncan, ‘Shooting the Colonial Past in Contemporary Italian Cinema. Effects of Deferral in *Good Morning Aman*’, in *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity*, ed. by Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), pp. 115-24, Áine O’Healy, ‘Screening Intimacy and Racial Difference in Postcolonial Italy’, in *Postcolonial Italy*, pp. 205-20, Shelleen Greene, *Equivocal Subjects*, Leonardo De Franceschi, *L’Africa in Italia. Per una controstoria postcoloniale del cinema italiano* (Rome: Aracne, 2013), Clarissa Clò, ‘Hip Pop Italian Style: The Postcolonial Imagination of Second-Generation Authors in Italy’, in *Postcolonial Italy*, pp. 275-91.

Simultaneously, the films offer a transnational perspective on *italianità*, as they refer indeed, on the one hand, to particular Italian habits, such as a specific approach to Catholicism and the accompanying superficial translation of this into the notion of *fare bella figura*, a specific regard towards prostitution and food, a focus on Rome as the metropole, and the type of the *inetto*, while they also reveal universal mechanisms, such as that of heteroreferential racism, and a sense of a ‘mechanical elasticity’. The notion of the *inetto* in order to describe Marcello Mastroianni’s characters (in *commedia all’italiana* and in other films) derives from the Jewish type of the *schlemiel*, and as such, already illustrates a transnational nature – and an interesting other type of o/Other to research in relation to the *commedia all’italiana*. The notion of heteroreferential racism refers to the universal human principle of projection as described by Freud. This underlines comedy’s specific combination of the contingency principle, referring to specific contexts, yet simultaneously referring to abstract, more universal, structures and mechanisms, or as Christopher Wagstaff calls them, ‘the deeper levels’. This is characteristic for the *commedia all’italiana* which focusses on the tension between private life and public life (as argued, for instance, by Mariapia Comand) from both a typically Italian, and from a universal perspective,⁴⁴⁵ making the *commedia all’italiana* interesting from a postcolonial perspective, as it deals with specific contexts of the imagined community of Italy, while alluding to the transnational. When we focus on the structural characteristics of the *commedie all’italiana* discussed here, the films turn out to invite viewers to reflect on Italy’s

⁴⁴⁵ Mariapia Comand, *Commedia all’italiana*, p. 9, Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (Mansfield: Martino Publishing, repr. 2010).

colonial past, its accompanying narratives, and consequences that impact today's society.

Images

64 Still *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1.00.42)



65 Still *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1.00.46)



66 Still *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1.03.30)



67 Still *Amarcord* (Federico Fellini, 1.04.05)

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